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ISSUE 018 | APRIL 2012

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PG. 14

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PG. 40

Mass Effect 3 Reviewed!

Shepard saves the world. But your marriage? PG. 58

Hack and Slash in Ninja Gaiden 3

Team Ninja and Tecmo Koei return! PG. 62

Television How YOU Like It!

The best ways to watch TV on your console. PG. 52

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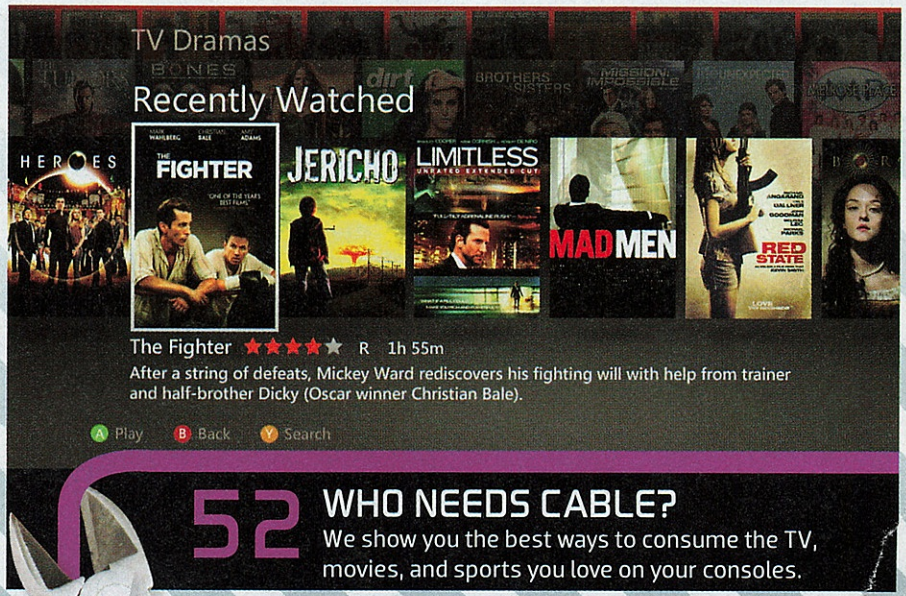
All those wires and tiny speakers everywhere is so 2000-something. Soundbars (or sound projectors) are the wave of the audio future.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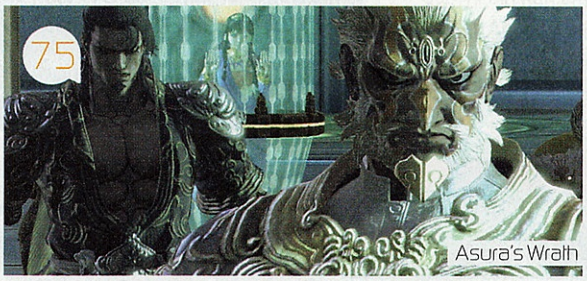

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MEET THE STAFF

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
We sent Andy to Vancouver for this month's cover story. The things he'll do for you, the @GAMER readers. Of course, being a hardcore hockey fan, we expected him to shirk his duties in favor of seeing some live hockey. No dice. The guy sat in a room playing *Prototype 2* for three days straight.

Jenny "Nag Vader" Esdaile Art Director
In Australia people get something like six months of a vacation time each year. Being the resident Aussie, Jenny loves her trips so much that she made her boyfriend get a job with Virgin Airways for the free flights. Last month? Las Vegas. This month? Palm Springs! Where should she go next? You make the call!

Jillian Lungaro Designer
Jillian is one of those people who's only happy when she's overworked, which is why several times a year she takes on the Herculean task of designing our sister publication PC Gamer's PC Build-It Special. Of course, once in the thick of it, she laments the lack of game time. No *Dark Souls* for you, Jillian!

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Prototype was a sleeper hit when it came out in 2009. While people liked much of the gameplay and the overall promise of the game, it lacked some of the polish that folks had come to expect on next-gen consoles. Enter *Prototype 2*.

With *Prototype 2*, Activision and Radical Entertainment hope to learn from its predecessor what went right and...well. what could use some improvement. We were stoked that they let us get an exclusive first-for-print review of *Prototype 2*. Head over to page 40 to see what Executive Editor Andy Eddy thought of this highly anticipated sequel.

Of course, this issue is packed with all kinds of goodness. Especially close to my heart (and wallet) is our feature story on the best ways to watch TV, movies, and sports on your consoles.

I'm a hardcore sports fan and fantasy sports addict but I also hate the idea of paying $100 a month to a cable or satellite provider. Turn to page 52 to figure out the best ways to watch everything that matters to you on a console.

William O'Neal
Editor-in-Chief

QR CODES AND HOW THEY WORK

Throughout the magazine you'll notice QR codes for some of the games. Simply install a QR reader for your smartphone (or install the Best Buy app for iPhone or Android), aim it at the QR code, and you'll be taken to a trailer for the game you just scanned.

Staff_

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I was reading through the 2011 Game of the Year Awards in issue 17 and noticed an odd bias present in the awards, particularly with *MW3*. Whoever wrote the article is trying to downplay *Battlefield 3*'s success. From the article, one would get the impression that *BF3* was a commercial failure with phrases such as *MW3* vs. *BF3* wasn't "...much of a battle after all" and that *BF3* was "bested," yet *BF3* has sold over 10 million copies to date, more than most AAA titles ever sell. But I guess whoever wrote the article didn't think of *BF3* as a true "competitor" to *MW3* and its commercial success.

—Avery S. via email

ED: *Hey Avery, @GAMER Editor-in-Chief Wil O'Neal here. Since I wrote that blurb I figured I'd chime in. You're right in that BF3 was in no way a failure. And yeah, selling 10M units is nothing to shake a stick at. That said, when compared to the numbers that MW3 put up, it's hard to say that BF3 really put up a decent fight.*

The *Mass Effect 3* co-op demo is awesome! Being able to play with three friends and take down enemies with biotics and omni-blades is what I've been waiting for with the series. What makes it even better is that it affects your single-player campaign. The feature to use each different class is awesome too, although I could do without giving a different name to each individual character. Overall though, the multiplayer will be played a ton by me & my friends. Can't wait to get my hands on the real deal come 3/6/12!

—Mike K. via email

ED: *You're not alone, Mike. We all just got our hands on Mass Effect 3 and well...let's just say that our significant others are not pleased. Be sure to check out our review on page 58.*

I am a huge fan of *@GAMER Magazine*! It has been one of my greatest influences in defining what I wish to do after graduation (senior year!): game journalism. I have been bitten by the journalism bug. I love to game, but take even more joy in sharing gaming knowledge with others. To prepare, I've even started my own website, with a small crew; trying to learn the craft as we go. I am also a total fan of the podcast! Getting to know each of your personalities and which games you play is interactive and fun.

—Marcus F. via email

ED: *Marcus, if you keep sending us letters like this, we'll publish them every month. But in all seriousness, we all love what we do and feel really lucky to be able to do it. Starting your own blog shows that you're on the right track. Of course, be sure to update it regularly and keep honing those skills!*

Could you guys please clarify whether or not coupons can be used on games that are on sale? Thanks for all your hard work! Keep it up.

—Bruce W. via email

ED: *Thanks for your letter, Bruce. We get this question quite a bit, but, yeah, @GAMER and Best Buy like to encourage "double-dipping." If a game is already discounted, the @GAMER coupon can be applied and should always be honored at the store. Also, coupons can be used for @Gamer/Unlocked offers on games that are on sale but CAN'T be used with conditional offers like "Buy 2, get the 3rd free."*

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

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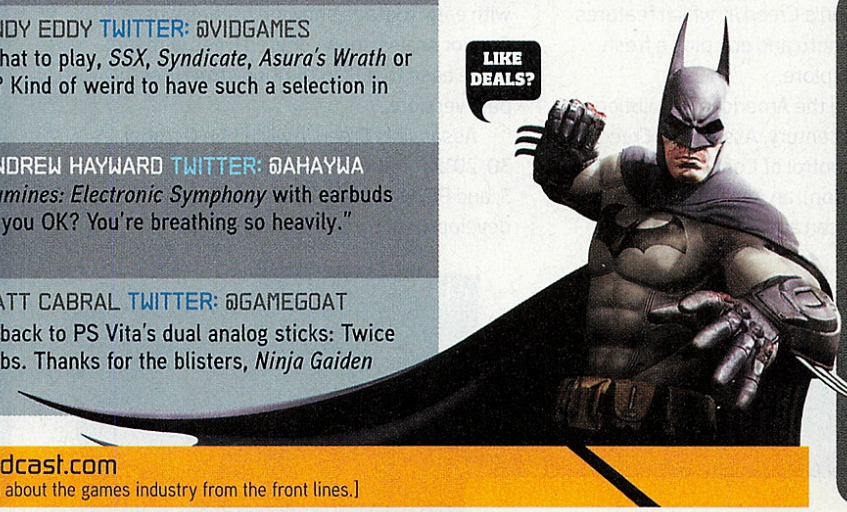
TWEETER: WIL O'NEAL TWITTER: @GAMER_WONEAL
The more time I spend with this PS Vita. The more I love the thing. Also, *Unit 13* is awesome. Way better than *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*.

TWEETER: ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES
Hmmm...what to play, *SSX*, *Syndicate*, *Asura's Wrath* or *Mass Effect 3*? Kind of weird to have such a selection in March.

TWEETER: ANDREW HAYWARD TWITTER: @AHAYWA
Playing *Lumines: Electronic Symphony* with earbuds in. Wife: "Are you OK? You're breathing so heavily." #intoit

TWEETER: MATT CABRAL TWITTER: @GAMEGOAT
Only drawback to PS Vita's dual analog sticks: Twice the sore thumbs. Thanks for the blisters, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus*!



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[Tune in for the latest information about the games industry from the front lines.]

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KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

Reckoning is high fantasy with a twist. Gone are the days of plodding *Elder Scrolls* combat, replaced with the breakneck dash-n-slash combos that only 38 Studios/Big Huge Games can provide. The game doesn't stop there, and gives the player the ability to go as deep as they want by providing an extremely intricate lore to the world that never feels forced upon the player. I have beaten the game, yet I still go in a few times a week if only to explore and wander.

Score: 4.5/5

—Ken H.

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[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

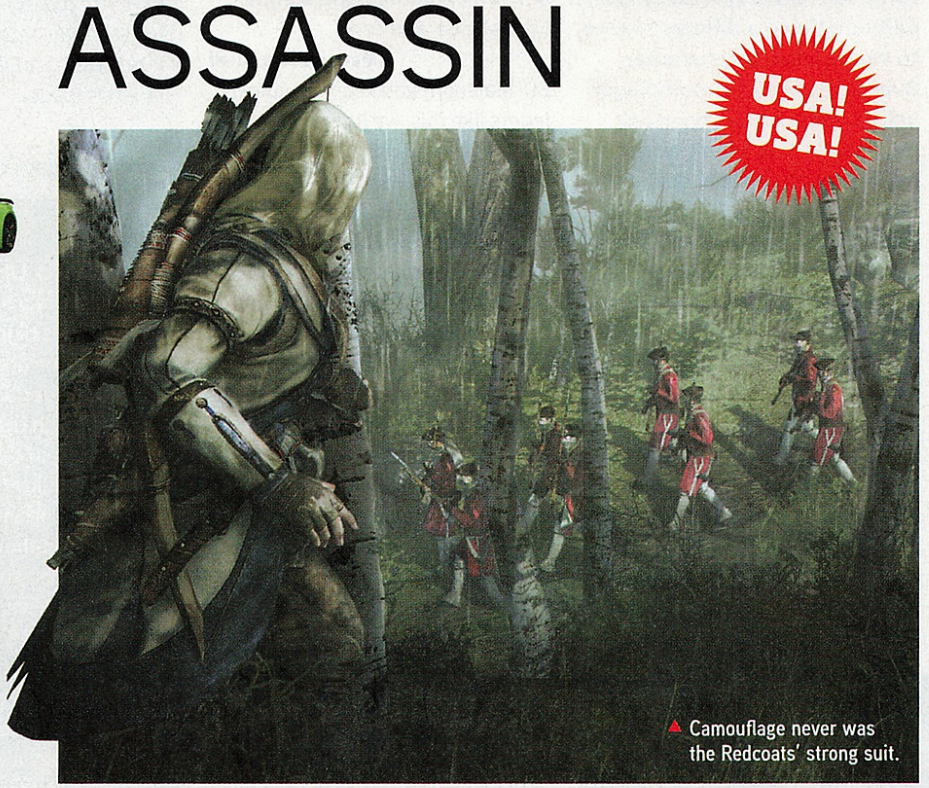
NEWS BITES

MICROSOFT will release *Forza Horizon* this fall, a new Xbox 360 iteration of the popular racing series developed by Playground Games.

AKIRA from the *Virtua Fighter* series will be included as a bonus character in Tecmo's *Dead or Alive 5*, due out later this year.

ANTICIPATED first-person shooter *BioShock Infinite* will debut on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC on October 16, says publisher 2K Games.

REVOLUTIONARY ASSASSIN



▲ Camouflage never was the Redcoats' strong suit.

After a pair of follow-ups to *Assassin's Creed II* in as many years, Ubisoft announced that the next series entry will be a full-fledged sequel titled *Assassin's Creed III*, which features a brand new hero and era, plus a fresh location to explore.

Set during the American Revolution in the late 18th century, *Assassin's Creed III* puts you in control of Connor (birth name: Ratohnhaké:ton), an Assassin with both Native American and English origins. In typical series fashion, the game spotlights the continuing battle between the Assassins and Templars, but Ubisoft claims the environments will be the largest to date, with early footage showing scenes where Connor scales snow-draped trees with the same ease that Ezio climbed structures in past versions.

Assassin's Creed III will hit on October 30, 2012 for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC, with a Wii U version also in development for a later release.

BEST BUY BONUS

PROTOTYPE 2

Receive a limited edition double-sided 18" x 24" poster instantly when you pre-order *Prototype 2* for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, or PC from BestBuy.com.

THE RAPTR REPORT

What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

1. The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
2. Mass Effect 3 Demo
3. Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning
4. Soulcalibur V
5. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3
6. Final Fantasy XIII-2
7. Syndicate Demo
8. Gears of War 3
9. Battlefield 3
10. Saints Row: The Third
11. Assassin's Creed: Revelations
12. FIFA Soccer 12
13. Star Wars: The Old Republic
14. WWE '12
15. Bastion

SOULCALIBUR V

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

INSIDE GOSSIP

RATCHET REVIVAL?

According to a listing that briefly appeared on the French Amazon.com website, an HD Collection for the original Ratchet & Clank series may be headed to PlayStation 3 in the near future. The rumored set would contain the three original PlayStation 2 platform-action favorites—Ratchet & Clank, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, and Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal—with higher-resolution visuals.

IN THE WORKS

**Fabled Friends **

Fable Heroes, a cartoon-stylized four-player action game based on the RPG series, is headed to Xbox Live Arcade later this year.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

ROBOMODO – CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA

GRIND SESSION

Formed in early 2008, Robomodo developed the peripheral-based *Tony Hawk: Ride* and *Tony Hawk: Shred*, and is currently working on *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD*, which uses standard controllers and features levels from the first two series entries.

NERD WORDS...

MASS EFFECT ART

Timed to release alongside Mass Effect 3, Dark Horse's *The Art of the Mass Effect Universe* expands upon the previous *The Art of Mass Effect* book with 184 pages of glorious artwork devoted to all three series entries. Featuring introductions by series art director Derek Watts and executive producer Casey Hudson, the book includes commentary and concept art about the role-playing epic's diverse characters, environments, weapons, and vehicles, and seems like an essential read for fanatical series fans. Just beware of Mass Effect 3 spoilers! The hardcover book is available now for $40.00.

DON'T FORGET THE POPCORN!

AT THE MOVIES

Sweet Tooth and his maniacal compatriots may soon storm the silver screen, while Capcom's courtroom drama adaptation sets a Stateside debut.

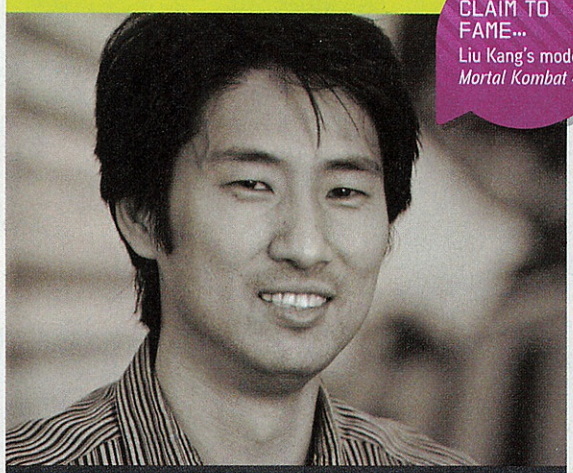
TWISTED METAL

Fresh off its recent PlayStation 3 revival, *Twisted Metal* may next be headed to the big screen, as Sony Pictures has reportedly inked a deal to develop a film based on the long-running car combat series. *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* co-director Brian Taylor will write and direct the film.

ACE ATTORNEY

The Japanese live-action film based on Capcom's beloved *Phoenix Wright* adventure game series will see its American debut at the AM2 anime, manga, and music convention in Anaheim, California this June. Beyond the initial screening, *Ace Attorney* will also be localized for worldwide release.

Five Questions with...



CLAIM TO FAME...
Liu Kang's model in *Mortal Kombat 4*

JOSH TSUI

Robomoto's President

1 What's it like to run an independent game developer?

It's kind of like parenting—a constant adventure of highs and lows. But I wouldn't have it any other way.

2 How does it feel to revive the classic *Tony Hawk* games?

It's a dream come true. The day I left my first videogame job, I was at a friend's house and he whipped out the first *Pro Skater*. After playing it, I stated, "I would kill to make a game like this." With that said, we've put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make this the game we all want it to be.

3 Is it difficult to take an older game and modernize it?

It's a huge challenge in that we have to design to people's memories—both mental and muscle. So we have to make sure we keep the exact same gameplay feel, but augment it with various features that enhance the experience without breaking the flow people are used to. It's a constant set of checks and (grind) balances.

4 What is it about Chicago that keeps you guys there?

The fabulous weather changes! Seriously, it's a great town with an awesome culture. The tech community outside of games is booming here and development studios here would be wise to tap into a community that is outside of games.

5 What excites you outside of gaming these days?

I studied film and video in school and it blows me away that camera and post-production technology is so accessible now in terms of both usability and costs. More and more "normal" people are making beautiful videos and are able to get them seen by anyone. That just didn't exist not too long ago. In many ways, the same thing is happening in games, where real professional engines are accessible and anyone can really take advantage of them.

▼ Over 22,500 students, developers, business folk, and games journalists went up and down these stairs and escalators.

GDC 2012

Behold, the 2012 Game Developers Conference!

• Words and photos: Dennis Scimeca

The 2012 Game Developers Conference brought students, programmers, producers, and press to San Francisco to discuss the art and science of videogames.

A few trends from the expo were the prevalence of free-to-play games like *Tactical Intervention*, *Warface*, *World of Warplanes*, *PlanetSide 2*, *MechWarrior Tactics*, and *MechWarrior Online*. The Independent Games Festival was awash with drama as upcoming Xbox Live Arcade title *Fez* won the Grand Prize for a second time. EA once again took the opportunity to reveal some military shooters, namely *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* and the next three DLC expansions for *Battlefield 3*.

GDC's real draw are the many panels and lectures given by the industry veterans of game development. The Game Developers Conference is a professional conference, not a consumer one. That means the attendees are there to discuss the serious issues that face the video game industry, and to make sure videogames are always innovating and growing. GDC helps make sure we will have new and exciting videogames for a very long time.

INDIE \\ The Independent Games Festival gives indie developers a chance to show off their games in the hopes of generating attention, or to secure financing or a publisher. Every year a portion of the Expo Hall is dedicated specifically to the games entered into the IGF, to let everyone at GDC judge the best game for themselves.

Without highly-tuned maps from Epic Lead Level Designer Jim Brown, *Gears 3* wouldn't be fun!

SORCERY

Sony showed off the Move game *Sorcery* in private demo sessions for the press. *Sorcery* may have you using Move like a magic wand, but the game has surprising amounts of hard-core appeal.

PS VITA

Sony had PS Vita stations set up in both the Expo Hall and the Business Center. At its annual GDC press briefing, Epic Games also showed off some killer PS Vita titles running on the Unreal Engine.

MOTION CAPTURE

Technology companies bring their hardware or software to show off at GDC in the hopes of making deals with game developers. Mo-cap actor Chris Jai Alex showed off his skills for the attendees.

GEARS \\ Some of the talks at GDC are all-day workshops, and one of the most interesting is Level Design in a Day. Developers who worked on *Dead Space 2* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* presented as part of this workshop, and Epic Games Lead Level Designer Jim Brown showed how the *Gears of War 3* multiplayer map called Trenches was designed from the ground up.

BLIZZARD RECRUITMENT \\ The Business Center at GDC is where young hopefuls can bring their portfolios for review by the professionals, some of whom are actually hiring at the show. The booths in the Business Center at GDC 2012 ranged from simple, temporary office cubicles to Blizzard's makeshift pub called "The Slaughtered Calf Inn," complete with a full bar for business types and plenty of seats for the students waiting to speak with Blizzard in the private rooms next door.

WAR GAME REVEALS \\ EA revealed *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* and gave the press hands-on time with the new *Battlefield 3* expansion *Close Quarters*. *Warfighter* depicts missions from real-life engagements carried out by American Special Forces and their allies, and *Close Quarters* moves *Battlefield 3* multiplayer indoors for tight, chaotic matches. Sony showed off the highly anticipated massively multiplayer online first-person shooter *PlanetSide 2*. Crytek showed off a free-to-play online shooter called *Warface* which runs on the *Crysis 2* engine. *Warface* offers 5-player co-op and head-to-head using near-future military hardware. Gooseman, one of the creators of *Counter-Strike*, was at GDC to show off his new game, *Tactical Intervention*, which pits terrorists against counter-terrorists in Hollywood-style firefights. *MechWarrior Online* is a free-to-play MMO in which you fight from the cockpits of giant, armored BattleMechs. GDC did not lack for action.

▲ Students can get professional advice or hired for jobs at GDC. These hopefuls will meet with the experts at Blizzard!

▲ This screenshot is from the escape scene at the end of the behind-closed-doors GDC demo of *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*.

Words: Andrew Hayward

Featured Game:
FAN-TACTICS

Relive this strategy classic on the iPad.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: THE WAR OF THE LIONS

Platforms:
$17.99, Square Enix, square-enix.com

The beloved tactical strategy spin-off of Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series comes to life on the large iPad screen, delivering dozens of hours of brainy combat augmented with alluring visuals and haunting music. Based on the PSP remake of the original PSone classic, *The War of the Lions* largely takes place on grid-based battlefields, where you'll take turns commanding your myriad heroes in an effort to secure victory. *Tactics* relies heavily on menus for most actions, but the game has been solidly adapted to iPad via touch commands. At nearly $18, *Final Fantasy Tactics* is a pricey proposition for iPad owners, but this is a meaty, full-fledged RPG classic that warrants both your time and money.

Elaborate battles dominate the experience.

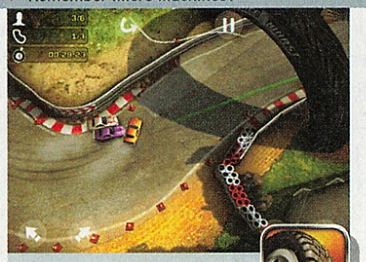
▼ Collect clocks, avoid cops.

BEAT SNEAK BANDIT

Platforms:
$2.99, Simogo, beatsneakbandit.com

When all the world's clocks are stolen, it's up to you—a stealthy hero—to recover them from the evil Duke Clockface's mansion. How? By sneaking around undetected to the beat of the song playing in each stage. Tapping to the rhythm lets you move around while dodging guards and other obstacles, with slick visuals and hopping tunes backing the action. It's the kind of quirky premise that can (and does) only work on a touch screen.

▼ Remember Micro Machines?



RECKLESS RACING 2

Platforms:
$4.99, Polarbit, polarbit.com

Like its great predecessor, *Reckless Racing 2* delivers speedy top-down racing action on both iPad and Android tablets, letting you whip around turns and fight for position via virtual touch buttons or a wheel, or by tilting the device. The sequel ups the ante with a load of new tracks and upgradeable cars, plus the game includes a series of solo cups, single events, and online races. It also looks slick, but don't get distracted behind the wheel!

▼ Good luck with that.

ZIGGURAT

Platforms:
$0.99, Freshuu, zggrt.com

Looking like a lost 16-bit relic, Ziggurat serves up an intense score-based quest, tasking you with standing atop the titular structure and defending it from incoming alien beasts. Using an aiming slider or a slingshot mechanism, you can launch energy balls at the foes, which range in size, speed, and power. The pulsing tunes and jarring red flash upon death make you want to jump back in after each quick session, and it's hard to let up.

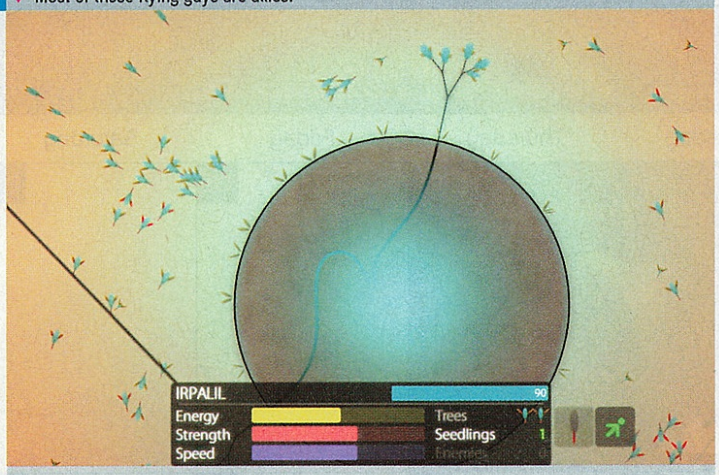
▼ Cacti and rocks aren't friendly.

RUN ROO RUN HD

Platforms:
$0.99, 5th Cell, runroorun.com

From the makers of *Scribblenauts* comes another iPad hit in the form of *Run Roo Run*, a game that unsurprisingly lets you command a running kangaroo. In each bite-sized stage, you must tap the screen at the exact moment to leap over a hazard or grab onto an object, all in the hopes of crossing the finish line. Both accessible and tricky, the app comes with hundreds of included stages, with even more added for free every week.

Most of those flying guys are allies.



EUFLORIA HD

Platforms:

$4.99, Omni Systems, eufloria-game.com

Putting a new spin on real-time strategy, *Eufloria HD* finds you taking control of planets in space by sending massive flying armies between them, planting trees to generate more, and redirecting squads as needed to fight off enemies. Compared to typical genre fare, *Eufloria HD* is remarkably soothing, with simple, pastel-heavy visuals, calming music, and a languid pace throughout. It doesn't look like much, but there's a lot to love here.

Terrified tortilla chips await their fate.

BAG IT!

Platforms:

$2.99 (iPad), $1.99 (Android), Hidden Variable, hiddenvariable.com

Properly bagging a stack of disparate groceries is no small task, and that mundane concept propels *Bag It!*, a Tetris-like puzzler wherein cute cartons of milk, melons, and baguettes must be properly positioned to keep everything safe and intact. It's a pretty easy game to learn, but with multiple play modes—including one in which you actually *try* to smash fragile foods—there's plenty of challenge and variety held within the light aesthetic.

Older favorites made fresh again

WE LOVE THE '90s

Retro Love!

The 1990s delivered a golden era of gaming, and many of our favorite experiences from those days are now available as tablet apps at bite-sized prices. Here are 10 essential favorites from the '90s that you can grab today!

01 **DOOM CLASSIC** ($4.99, idsoftware.com)
The game that made first-person shooters into a sensation is back in action on iPad, with the entire single-player campaign presented with capable touch controls.

02 **SONIC CD** ($4.99, sega.com)
Reviving the Sega CD entry that most players missed, this Sonic the Hedgehog side-scrolling adventure introduces time travel, and features some killer tunes to boot!

03 **ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT 3** ($0.99, ea.com)
Pairing the bloody fighting gameplay of the '90s smash hit with lightly upgraded visuals, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* offers up the series's ultra-violence on the go.

04 **ANOTHER WORLD: 20TH ANNIV.** ($4.99, bulkypix.com)
Originally released here as *Out of this World*, this cinematic side-scrolling action game lets you swap between the 16-bit visuals and updated ones on the fly.

05 **NBA JAM** ($4.99, easports.com)
While technically a new version with current rosters and fresh graphics, *NBA Jam* maintains all of the fast-paced b-ball antics of the beloved early '90s originals.

06 **SOULCALIBUR** ($14.99, namco-bandai.com)
The beloved Dreamcast fighter looks better than ever on iPad thanks to higher-resolution visuals, while touch buttons keep the 3D action as fluid as expected.

07 **WWE WRESTLEFEST HD** ($3.99, thq.com)
Pro wrestling fans have a place in their hearts for this arcade favorite, and the iPad version mixes old fighters with new favorites while maintaining the in-ring action.

08 **SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SE** ($4.99, lucasarts.com)
The hilarious visual adventure holds up two decades later via this special edition release, which comes with updated visuals—and all the original charm intact.

09 **WOLFENSTEIN 3D CLASSIC PLATINUM** ($1.99, idsoftware.com)
Before *Doom* we had *Wolfenstein 3D*, which pioneered the shooter genre; now you can relive the violent Nazi-blasting quest for just a couple bucks on iPad.

10 **BROKEN SWORD: DIR'S CUT HD** ($5.99, revolution.co.uk)
First released in 1996, this point-and-click PC adventure game translates well to iPad, where the mysterious plot and updated visuals shine on the large touch screen.

CALENDAR

APRIL 2012

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 APRIL FOOL'S DAY	02	03 ■ Devil May Cry HD Collection ■ Fallout 3 & Oblivion Double Pack ■ Funky Barn 3D ■ Kinect Star Wars ■ Kinect Star Wars Console	04 Kinect Star Wars	05	06	07
08 @GAMER ISSUE 18 ON SALE EASTER	09 Devil May Cry Collection	10	11	12 ↘ 2004—Superhero MMO *City of Heroes* goes gold.	13 ■ Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 39	14
15 ↘ 1999—Sega announces that its Dreamcast console will launch in America on 9/9/99.	16	17 ■ The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	18 The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	19	20	21 ↘ 2000—John Romero's ill-fated first-person shooter *Daikatana* debuts.
22 EARTH DAY	23	24 ■ Prototype 2 ■ Prototype 2 Collector's Edition	25 ↘ 1972—U.S. Patent 3,659,285, "Television Gaming Apparatus and Method," awarded to Ralph Baer et al.	26	27 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 40	28
29 Prototype 2	30					

ARE YOU A PRE-ORDER PRO?

If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!

MAY 2012 HIGHLIGHTS:

Starhawk: 05/08
Game of Thrones: 05/15
Max Payne 3: 05/15
Dragon's Dogma: 05/22
Ghost Recon Future Soldier: 05/22

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▼ Combaticons can transform into the Decepticon combiner, Bruticus. Official toy coming soon.

TRANSFORMERS FALL OF CYBERTRON

Do the robot (in disguise) • Words: Evan Shamoon

Transformers: Fall of Cybertron is High Moon Studios' third in the series. It depicts the final battle between the Autobots and Decepticons, which leads to the destruction of their home world and forces the Autobots to seek refuge in our very own galaxy.

High Moon's previous title, *War for Cybertron*, was the highest-rated *Transformers* game, and all efforts have been made to surpass it. Looking back at fan feedback, the team found that the most common complaints concerned a lack of variety, in terms of both gameplay and visuals.

"We aimed straight at people who didn't play *WfC*, and thought about what we wanted them to say about this game," says Director Matt Tieger, of preproduction. "We want those people to tell their friends that the gameplay variety is incredible, that this is a stunning game to look at."

As such, different bots entail vastly different gameplay experiences. "Each character's ability is so unique that it affects not only the pacing but the player's combat tactics," says Tieger. Cliffjumper and Jazz, for example, couldn't be more different: The former can turn invisible, while the latter has a grappling hook.

"With the cloak ability to turn yourself invisible [during Cliffjumper's level], you're in control of when things happen and we unfold lots of story for you," Tieger says. For Jazz, however, it's more hectic, and you'll use the grappling hook to get in and out of trouble in a hurry.

When forced to pick a favorite new weapon, Tieger chose the Lightning Gun (noting that all weapons can be upgraded). "Initially, the Lightning Gun shoots a lightning bolt that shocks targets, but when fully upgraded it branches to additional targets and even blocks incoming rockets," he says. "It's a ton of fun."

▲ Starscream makes a return—and in fine form, once again serving as the Decepticon air commander.

TRANCE FARMERS

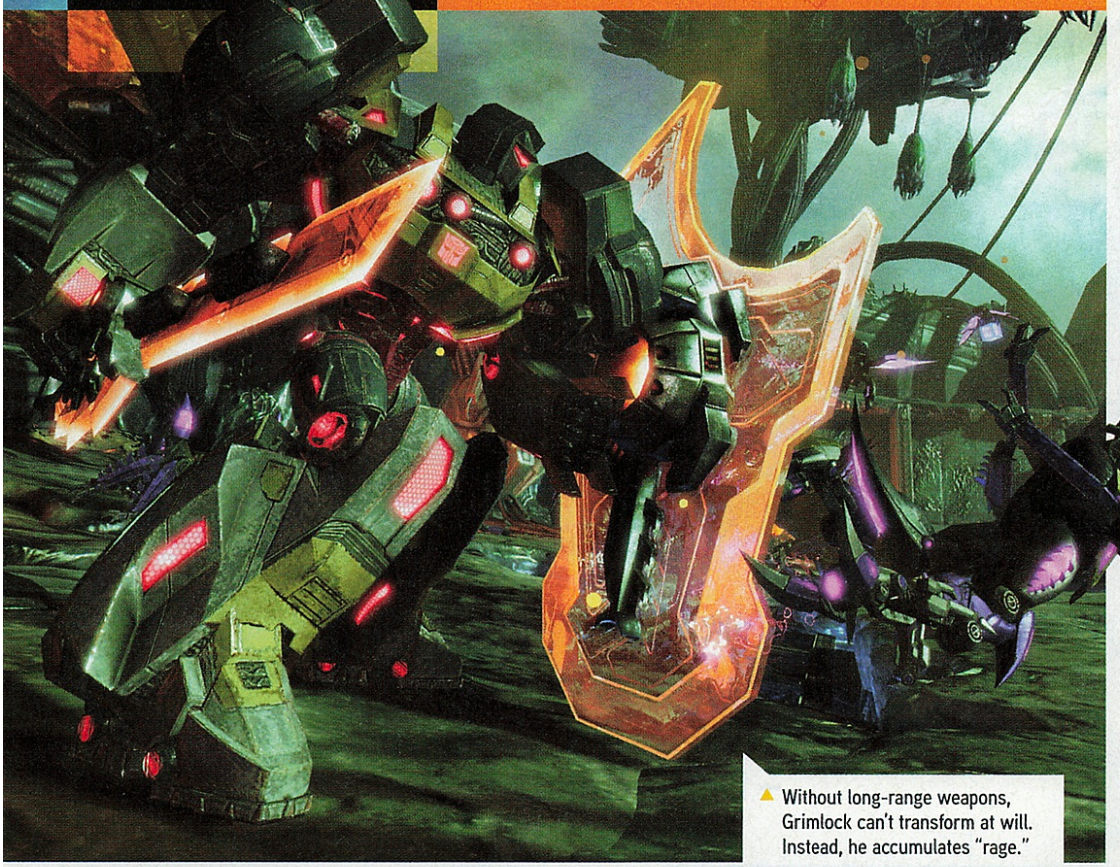
Online multiplayer will make a return, though details on modes (outside of War for Cybertron's slick competitive component) are scant. Fans should be happy to hear that online play will feature "named" Transformers this time, rather than palette-swapped doppelgangers.

LAST GUARDIAN

The Guardian's base mode is its patrol form; when it spots a player, it transforms into battle mode, a heavy attack setting.

PRIME TIME

Optimus Prime (pictured) underwent design changes for *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron*, sporting a more battle-scarred look.



▲ Without long-range weapons, Grimlock can't transform at will. Instead, he accumulates "rage."

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

TRANSFORMERS: FALL OF CYBERTRON

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: High Moon Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes; no details yet

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Autobots, Decepticons, and angry robot enthusiasts

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Transformers: War for Cybertron... or perhaps a little *Gears of War 3*? It has mechs, after all.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ The series's previous game was better than expected, and *FoC* looks that much better
- ❤ Much more gameplay variety

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Four games in five years = *Transformers* burnout

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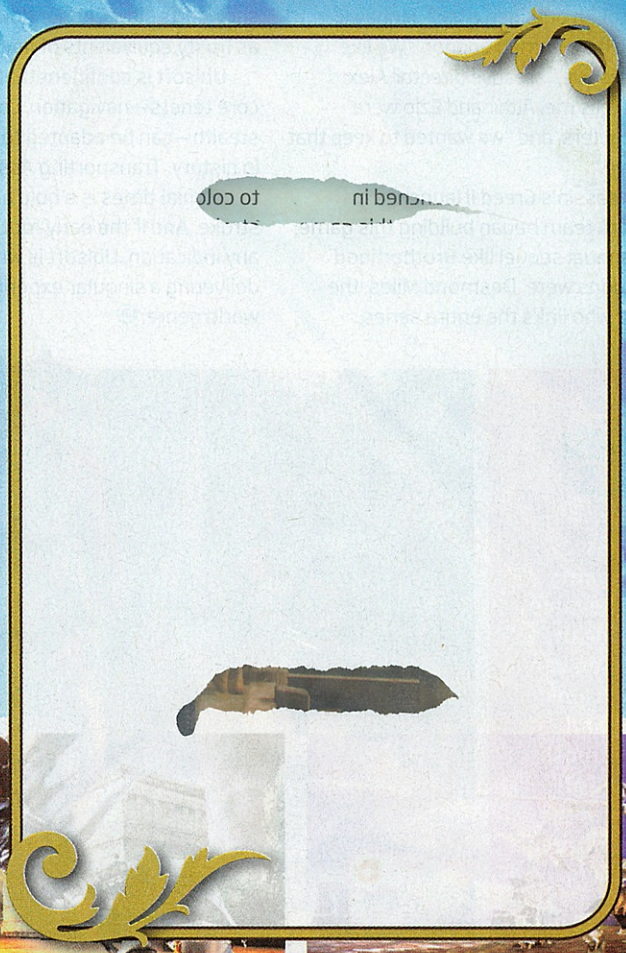

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EVERYONE 10+
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Fantasy Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes

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ASSASSIN'S CREED III

A new Assassin faces the Templar threat in the New World

• Words: Samit Sarkar

It is the summer of '75—1775, that is—and the air reeks of gunpowder. You dart across the Battle of Bunker Hill with one objective: a sneak attack on the British camp. Leaping through trees on the battlefield's edge, you encounter a few Redcoat scouts. After quickly dispatching them with your tomahawk and one of their muskets, you climb a cliff and complete your mission by taking out an officer on horseback.

Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* games tell fictional stories amid the intriguing backdrop of historical events. *Assassin's Creed III* takes the series from the Old World to the New, recounting the founding of America through the journey of an outsider: a half-Mohawk, half-English hero named Connor. "We like being progressive," creative director Alex Hutchinson tells me. Altaïr and Ezio were unique characters, and "we wanted to keep that tradition alive."

Once *Assassin's Creed II* launched in 2009, its core team began building this game; it's not an annual sequel like *Brotherhood* and *Revelations* were. Desmond Miles, the descendant who links the entire series, sees "more screen time" here, although Ubisoft wouldn't confirm whether this game concludes his tale.

Assassin's Creed III brings major changes to the franchise. It features the port cities of New York and Boston, but a third of the game takes place in the Frontier, a sprawling forested wilderness populated by "big islands of content" like Lexington and Concord or Valley Forge. There's an impressive fluidity to Connor's animations as he jumps between branches, hunting animal and human targets alike. Ubisoft's new engine accounts for weather, too, with summer and winter versions for each of the three areas. Thigh-high snowdrifts slow Connor down, but also serve as frosty equivalents of hay bales.

Ubisoft is confident that the franchise's core tenets—navigation, combat, and stealth—can be adapted to almost any era in history. Transporting *Assassin's Creed III* to colonial times is a bold and long-overdue stroke. And if the early footage I saw is any indication, Ubisoft is well on its way to delivering a singular experience in the open-world genre.

▼ The rustic Frontier area is massive: Alone, it's 50% larger than all of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood.*

MEET THE NEW LOCALS

Ubisoft put a lot of effort into designing more believable crowds. Ideally, each person in a scene will look different and have a purpose, and they'll all be aware of the people and events around them.

▲ Occupied Boston offers opportunities for series staples like blending into crowds and eluding guards.

NATIVE SON
Mohawk ancestry gives Connor an outsider's perspective on the Revolution.

NATIVE GARB
Connor's unique attire reflects colonial, Mohawk, and Assassin influences.

RUBBING ELBOWS WITH HISTORY

Connor's tale is intertwined with the Revolution, and he interacts with Founding Fathers such as Ben Franklin, John Adams, and George Washington. Maybe we'll learn the truth about the cherry tree.

▲ Expect better-looking cut-scenes. Ubisoft used advanced performance capture techniques in order to deliver much more lifelike character interactions.

▲ Previous games explored religious themes. But the colonial setting lets Ubisoft focus on issues like slavery and the marginalization of Native American culture.

01 POINT TAKEN
You *really* don't want this bayonet inside you. I mean, who knows where it's been?

02 DANGER CLOSE
This dagger's the last thing many people will ever see—*if* they see it at all.

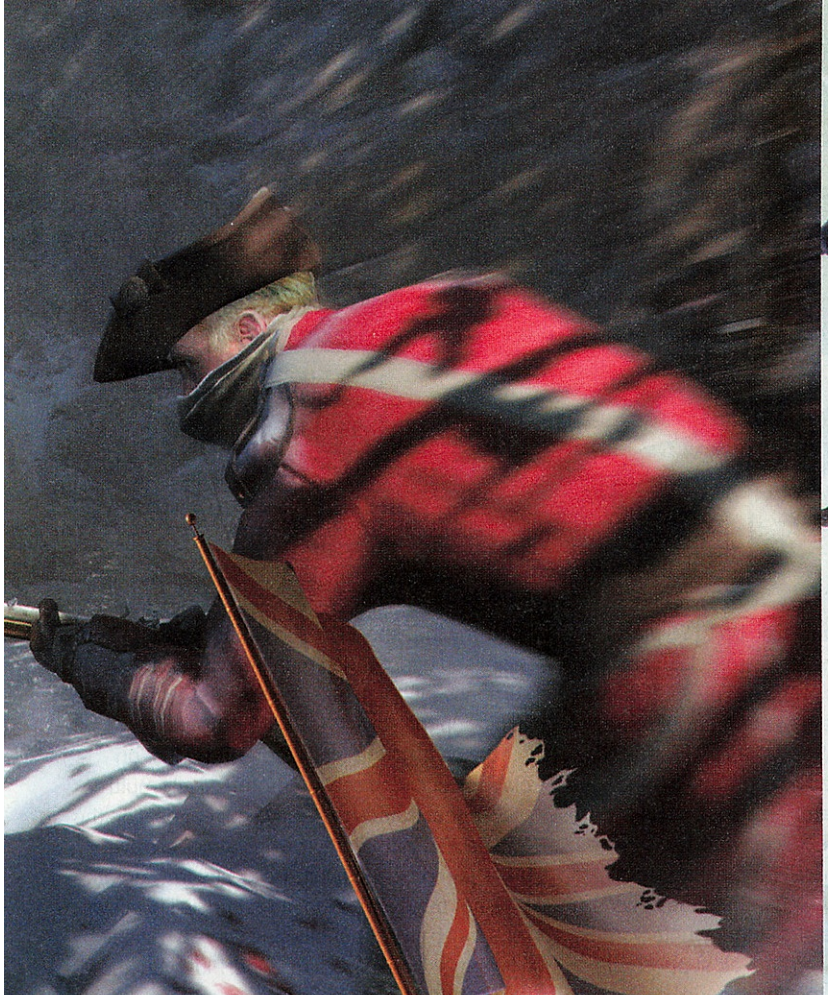
03 DEATH FROM AFAR
Some of Connor's other victims might at least hear an arrow fired from his bow.

04 AXE MURDERER
Burying a tomahawk in a guy's face isn't exactly stealthy, but it sure is effective.

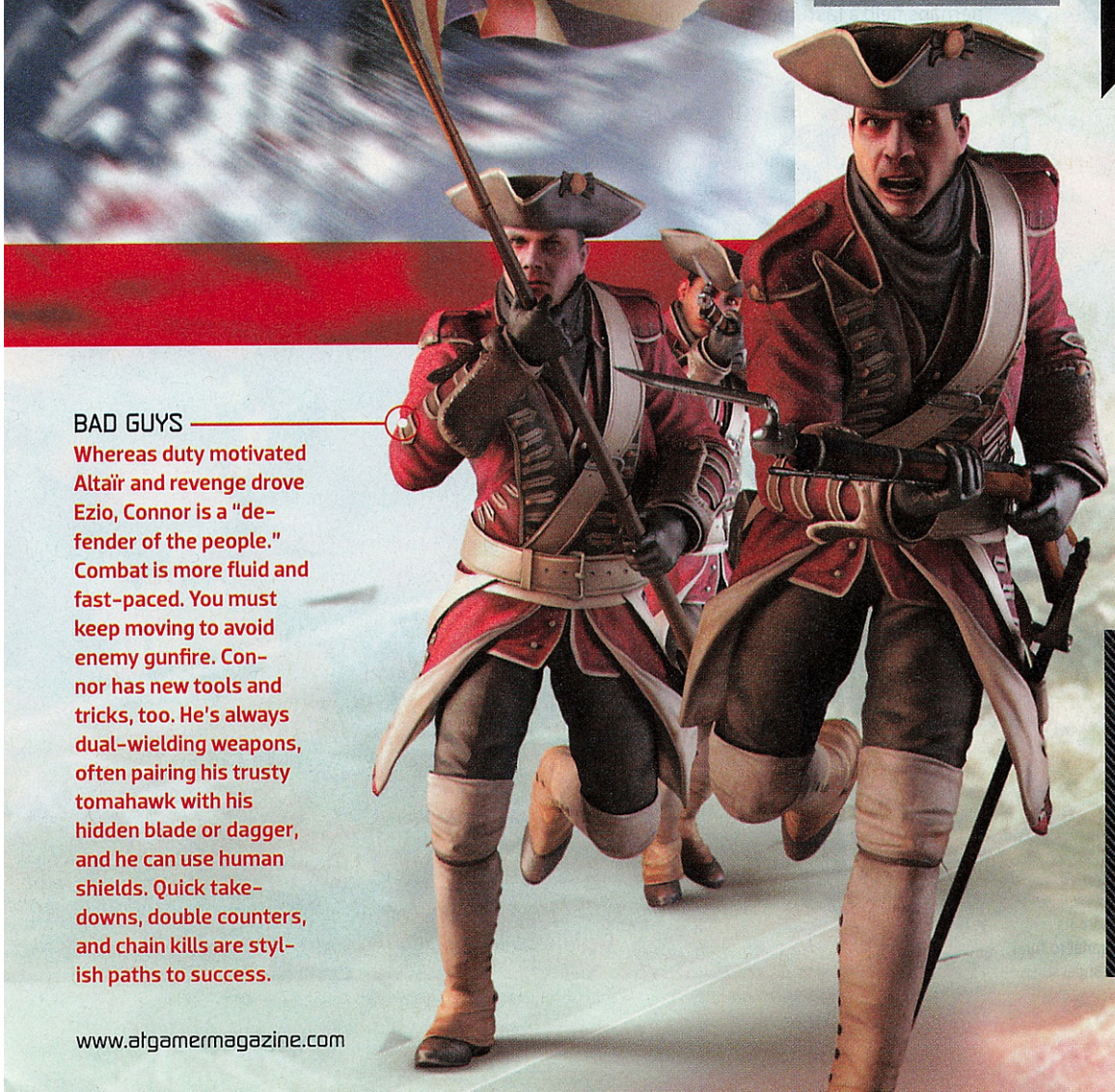
DON'T TREAD ON ME

Connor only killed Redcoats in the demo I saw. But he's a free agent, a wild card—he's not aligned with either party in the Revolution, because his main mission concerns Templars. "There are Templars on both sides," says Hutchinson; "he's not necessarily a Patriot." As a crusader for justice, Connor plays a variety of roles. Sometimes, he supports Mohawks against encroaching colonists; at other points, he helps the Patriots overthrow the British.

▲ In summer, leafy trees and shrubs afford Connor better cover, one of an Assassin's greatest assets.



NATIVE-BORN KILLER
His Mohawk name is Ratohnhaké:ton (that's ra-doon-ha-gay-DOO). He goes by Connor. Whatever you call him, he's out to kill Templars.



BAD GUYS
Whereas duty motivated Altaïr and revenge drove Ezio, Connor is a "defender of the people." Combat is more fluid and fast-paced. You must keep moving to avoid enemy gunfire. Connor has new tools and tricks, too. He's always dual-wielding weapons, often pairing his trusty tomahawk with his hidden blade or dagger, and he can use human shields. Quick takedowns, double counters, and chain kills are stylish paths to success.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC Wii U

GAME DETAILS

RATING PENDING RP Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info. CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

ASSASSIN'S CREED III

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Wii U

RELEASE DATE
October 30, 2012 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC); 2012 (Wii U)

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
History buffs, nature lovers, people who like stabbing dudes

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Catch up on the story with

Assassin's Creed: Revelations, which leads directly into this game.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Assassin's Creed III*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Unique protagonist—how many games feature Native Americans?
- ❤ Historical authenticity and cultural respectfulness

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ A few animation glitches, but there's plenty of time to iron them out

END OF NATIONS

A new distribution of strategic power • Words: Ryan Scott

I'm betting that an awful lot of real-time strategy fans are a lot like me: You love the idea of playing a fast and frantic game of speed chess against an equally skilled opponent, but when your economy takes off and the armies start fighting, you freeze. Suddenly, you have 100 units at your fingertips...and you're overwhelmed at the scale of your predicament. You tense up, you choke, and it's all over. Well, my choice-paralyzed friends, Petroglyph Games just might have the RTS for all of us.

With its upcoming free-to-play RTS *End of Nations*, Petroglyph takes a bold risk: Up to 56 players—yes, that's 28 players *per team*—clash on massive battlefields, with each player fielding a customized, specialized company of roughly 6 to 10 units apiece. Resources trickle in at a steady rate (bolstered by capturing myriad contested nodes scattered across a given map), and are spent to redeploy downed units in the field, plant turrets, or call for massive radial nukes, among other things. The good news is that you're one piece of a bigger whole; you might choose to play an anti-air support role or perhaps field a fast-moving ground army that specializes in capturing compromised undefended map objectives. If your company falls, you have a whole team of players to pick up the slack.

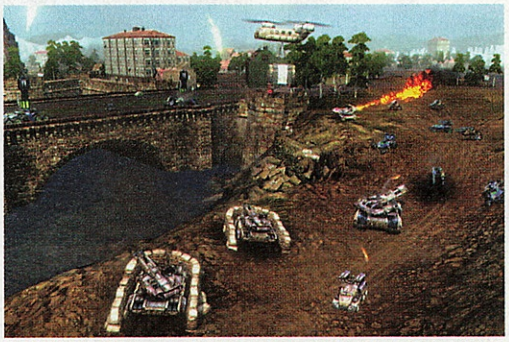
Based on my recent 12-on-12, hands-on play session, *End of Nations*' massively multiplayer bent stands to achieve a great deal on the RTS accessibility front. Its mechanics are every bit as complex and hardcore as any truly great RTS, but the distribution of responsibility allows for a much smoother learning curve while still allowing skilled players to shine. Plus, you know, it's *free*. What have you got to lose?

▲ One wonders how the grassroots Liberation Front has the capital to fund hundreds of single-soldier supersuits.

▼ These anti-air ground units are about to go all paper on that helicopter's rock.

**FREE REIGN ** *End of Nations* joins a growing number of free-to-play (or "freemium") PC games, offering a full RTS experience while also giving you bang for the disposable bucks. Don't fret at the microtransaction-based model: Developer Petroglyph has taken a hard stance against pay-to-win incentives, and the premium goodies are limited to cosmetic features (such as unit skins) and mild XP boosts for the time-strapped. All of the maps, factions, classes, and units are available to everyone.

▲ Pro tip: Don't let the bad guys invade your base. If they do, blame your teammates.



▲ If you're a fan of big, slow tanks, then feel free to assemble an entire company of 'em.

PANIC!

The near-future world presented in *End of Nations* has suffered a full economic collapse—nations have struggled and crumbled, a dictatorial new government known as the Order of Nations has risen to power, and the world's just become a really crummy place for everyone. The action really gets rolling when the Liberation Front (a sort of grassroots political reform faction) and the Shadow Revolution (an Order of Nations splinter faction out for absolute power) start throwing their giant armies at each other. And that's where you come in!

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

END OF NATIONS

INFO
Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: Petroglyph Games
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 56-player online

GENRE
Massively multiplayer real-time strategy

SUITABLE FOR
Real-time strategy nuts, team-oriented gamers

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

What better way to brush up on your RTS skills than with the big star itself, *StarCraft II*?

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *End of Nations*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Huge multiplayer battles
- ❤ Smaller-scale individual armies ease the learning curve

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The jury's still out on what will make up the faction-specific tech trees

Stand Your Ground
The right stance and careful parrying wins. Swinging like a maniac will get you killed.
Take These Guys Seriously
These sand devils appear in the starting area, but they are not a joke.

RISEN 2

An action role-playing game that will seriously test your mettle • Words: Dennis Scimeca

Risen 2 is set in a world that resembles the Caribbean of the 1600s, where powerful creatures called Titans have risen from the depths of the ocean and are destroying the world. You are a member of the Inquisition, a military-religious order protecting humanity that was tasked in my demo with infiltrating a pirate gang which discovered a magical weapon that kills Titans.

My first step was to travel from the Inquisition's fortress of Caldera, with a companion named Patty, to meet with her father in the pirate cove on Tacarigua Island. Tacarigua was lush with tropical plant life, had impressive shadow effects cast by the blazing sun overhead, and a sugar plantation worked by slaves. The pirate cove was on the other side of the island, which meant traversing and fighting my way through the jungle.

I started the game on medium difficulty, but quickly dialed it back to easy. Tough enemies, such as jaguars, put up a heck of a fight, and the first tomb spider I ran across slaughtered me half a dozen times before I pulled out a victory. Combat is about careful positioning, patience, and timing your strikes just right. For whatever else you can say about *Risen 2*, it does not lack challenge.

Risen 2's traditional RPG mechanics are wrapped in the pirate theme. Health isn't measured in hit points; it's measured in Blood. You don't earn experience points by completing quests and defeating enemies; you earn Glory, which can be spent advancing proficiencies in swashbuckling, buying powder-based guns (such as muskets), and improving voodoo magic, among other skills.

The weakest part of the experience was the story—something you expect to be strong in an RPG. I also wasn't too impressed with the dialogue or the characters so far, so if you're looking for a gripping tale, *Risen 2* might not foot the bill. If you care more about an expansive world to explore and combat that tests your skills, this is a game to keep tabs on.

NICE BANDANNA!

Most RPGs fall into fantasy or sci-fi varieties. *Risen 2* is obviously closer to fantasy, but really plays into the pirate theme. You won't be wearing fancy helmets, but a nice bandanna might do the trick. You'll have guns, but they're powder-based pistols and muskets. Pirate shirts aren't puffy, but do protect you from bullets and blades—and it takes a while to get used to the baggy, striped pants. Just enjoy the pirate theme and you'll be crunching stats with your gear like normal!

▼ When cutlass and black powder aren't enough, black magic can help take down some monsters.

MIXING REAL AND FANTASTIC

Some of the enemies in my preview were what you might expect on a tropical island, such as monkeys, warthogs, and jaguars. There were giant spiders and weird beach creatures called sand devils, as well, but later in the game you'll fight more strictly fantasy-themed monsters. If just the giant spiders made me hesitant to walk into caves, I can't imagine how difficult these late-game monsters are going to be. If you really like combat with a challenge, *Risen 2* delivers.

▲ You can fry the meat you get from animals you've killed to make provisions that regenerate Blood.

▲ Later, you'll be able to brew potions with the plants you find on the islands and practice voodoo magic.

▲ I mostly fought with blades, because they're fun, but powder-based guns cause big damage...and make a big bang.

APPRECIATE IMAGINATION

Risen 2's creativity is more important than its production values. No, it's not as pretty as some other games. No, it doesn't have a Hollywood writer and voice cast, but the unique world makes up for it. *Risen 2* is decidedly an adventure, which is what an RPG ought to be.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

RISEN 2

INFO
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Piranha Bytes
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
April 24, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who wants really challenging real-time combat in an RPG

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Risen 2 is obviously a sequel,

so check out the original *Risen*...but go with the better PC version.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Risen 2*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The world is very different from most RPGs on the market
- ❤ The combat is extremely challenging

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The dialogue and characters haven't impressed me yet
- ✖ The combat can get frustrating really quickly

PORT ROYALE 3

Piracy ain't all bad • Words: Ryan Scott

Maybe something's critically wrong with me, but I absolutely love strategy games that reward me for being a power-mad jerk. The *Tropico* series is perhaps the greatest example—build a sleepy banana republic into a self-serving empire of petty embezzlement and political manipulation, then use every resource at hand to maintain your seat of power and crush anyone who takes issue with it—and I immediately got the sense that Kalypso's *Port Royale 3* invites these same sorts of dirty tactics on a grander scale.

Port Royale 3 is all about establishing dominance during Europe's colonization of the Caribbean. On the surface, it's a light economic simulation: Ally your modest city-state with one of the nations from the obligatory Caribbean quartet (England, Spain, France, and the Dutch Republic), manage each city's resources and exports, fight off pirates here and there (via a ship-to-ship combat system that plays out almost beat-for-beat like the one from 2004's *Sid Meier's Pirates!*), perhaps engage in some privateering of your own, and generally guide your territory to prosperity.

But the real fun lies beneath *Port Royale 3*'s surface. Grow powerful enough, and you can establish yourself as the Caribbean's dominant superpower. Maybe you'll cripple your foes economically, first establishing (and protecting) solid trade routes, then buying up particular resources to create an artificial shortage (and a lucrative demand). Maybe you'll bleed an enemy town's resources dry and hire its desperate workers for a song. Or perhaps it's a pirate's life for you, and you'll expand your empire by force.

Regardless of where your whims might take you, it seems like *Port Royale 3* has something to appease just about any economic sim fan out there. And—rare as this is, especially for such a typically PC-centric genre—it seems tailor-made for console play, thanks to a clean and simple user interface, and myriad speed-of-play options (such as auto-resolving combat). And, ya know, who *doesn't* want to be a mighty pirate?

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW \\

One of *Port Royale 3*'s most intriguing features is its real-time multiplayer mode, for up to four players. Set sail with your buddies, forge alliances, stab each other in the back, steal everyone's stuff (and cities), and find out who's the biggest no-good pirate! Early estimates from the developers at Kalypso peg multiplayer game times unfolding across as many as 30 hours, though you can certainly set time- or resource-based victory conditions to keep the pace a bit more sane.

WE'RE OFF TO LEARN THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND!

▼ See all those flags? That means "You all work for me now."

▲ You can send your enemies into the drink yourself or let the game auto-resolve combat for you.

THE CARIBBEAN'S NEVER LOOKED QUITE SO GOOD IN A VIDEOGAME \\

SEA CHANGE \\

Much of *Port Royale 3*'s action unfolds on a giant map of the Caribbean, with controlled cities and traveling ships marked by their national flags. Cities gradually evolve and grow from small villages to thriving economic centers on their own, though you have a high degree of control over such things as resource production, import/export rates, and working conditions in individual cities. Factors such as weather conditions, food shortages, and...well, piracy can have serious ripple effects on your global economic welfare, so it's important to pay careful attention to how your individual holdings are doing, and take an active hand in maximizing (and protecting!) their output.

GAME DETAILS

PORT ROYALE 3

INFO
Publisher: Kalypso Media
Developer: Kalypso Media
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Summer/Fall 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4-player co-op/competitive

GENRE
Strategy simulation

SUITABLE FOR
Economy-obsessed strategy gamers, aspiring armchair dictators

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Got the civilization-dominating itch? Try *Tropico 4* (and its brand-new *Modern Times* expansion).

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Port Royale 3*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Room for lots of economic experimentation
- ❤ Potential for some fun competitive multiplayer

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Without any sort of boarding/swordfighting mode, sea combat doesn't seem too involved

DIRT SHOWDOWN

You might feel a little pressure on your back bumper... • Words: Andy Eddy

While many expected—maybe even hoped—Codemasters would bring us *Dirt 4* in 2012, the *Dirt* roadmap is taking a slight detour with *Dirt Showdown*. Yes, Codemasters says, *Dirt 4* is still in the works, but *Showdown* will come first as an expansion of the now-established franchise, with the company reps using such terms as "theater of racing," "festival atmosphere," and "dialed to 11" to describe it.

An arcade racer at its foundation, *Showdown* will provide a variety of driving events (see the "Trick Ride," "Beat-Up Beatdown," and "Smashing Success" sidebars for a breakdown) that should test your skills in many different ways. And Codemasters told @GAMER that *Dirt Showdown*'s action will take place across 10 "iconic" locations: Baja California, Colorado, London, Los Angeles, Miami, Michigan, Nevada, San Francisco, Tokyo, and Yokahama—a diverse itinerary that enables the game to offer varied terrain in its races and events. You have to expect that Nevada and probably Baja California will comprise a decent dose of desert driving, while Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco should offer scenic street rides. Is Michigan on the list for its snow and ice?

Codemasters is also designing *Showdown* to be one of the most social games that you've ever played. In addition to online Party Modes that'll bring together groups of racers to compete, friends will also get the opportunity to issue challenges to each other, which they can attempt at their own pace without having to be online at the same time as the challenger. And even the single-player campaign will enable a form of sharing: Big crashes can be replayed from different camera angles as well as posted to YouTube, so your friends can enjoy without having to be in the game.

The game's late-May release means there's still some work being done to finish and polish the game, but what Codemasters demoed showed much promise for being highly entertaining and competitive. And you can expect *Dirt Showtime*'s debut should soften the blow of having to wait for *Dirt 4*. Well...maybe a little.

TRICK RIDE

Dirt Showdown will offer a trilogy of what Codemasters is calling "organized auto chaos." One prong of the threesome is stunt and trick action under the banner of "Hoonigan events," which are an evolution of the "gymkhana" courses that *Dirt* veterans have already gotten to know and love. Some events will push your driving, drifting, and trick skills to the limit for a maximum score across a sizable obstacle course, while others are challenges that urge you to cut loose in the biggest point-grabbing stunt you can unleash.

BIG CRASHES CAN BE REPLAYED...[AND] POSTED TO YOUTUBE...

DIRT SHOWDOWN

INFO
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
May 29, 2012

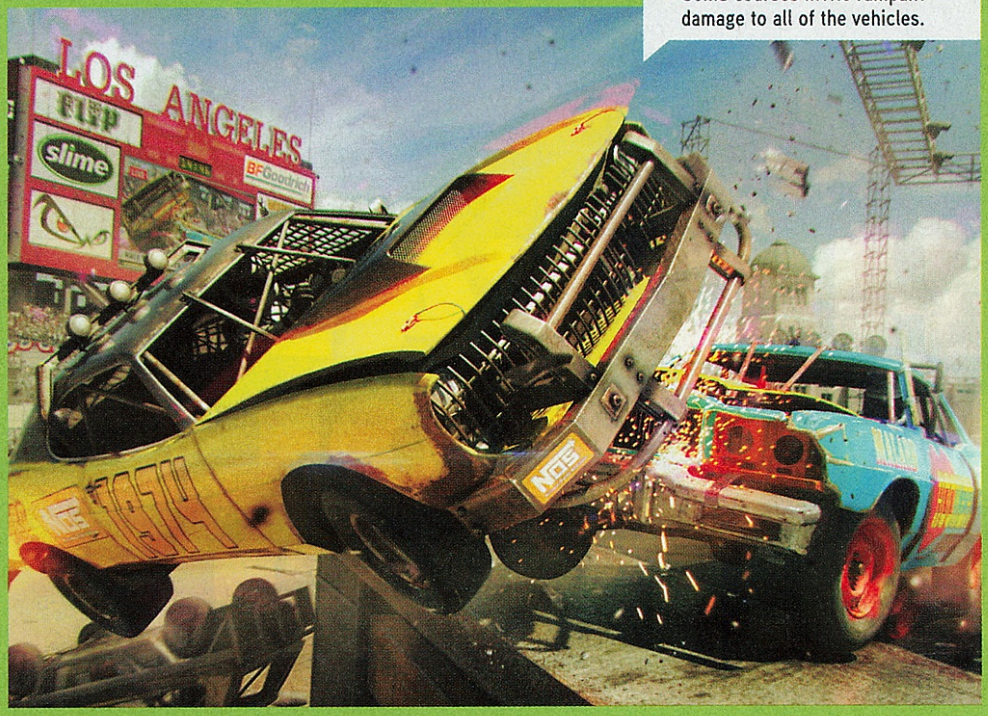
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online; 2-player splitscreen

GENRE
Racing

SUITABLE FOR
Racers who want spicy sprints

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The latest chapter in the *Twisted Metal* series should keep you happily dashing and crashing.



▼ Some courses invite rampant damage to all of the vehicles.

BEAT-UP BEATDOWN

The "demolition" events offer you maximum mayhem—with some goods and bads to consider. On the bad side, it's unfortunate that you won't be able to trash licensed vehicles. But in the good column is having the ability to bash vehicles with a hearse.

RACIN' AND RUBBIN' \\

▲ Not only will *Dirt Showdown* have races that take place at night, but it'll also have you considering weather effects.

▲ Having a NASCAR-like stock car should enable you to power through turns...but mind the poor traction on dirt.

SMASHING SUCCESS

The third component is, of course, "speed" in the form of hardcore racing action...but none of these events are free of some paint being traded. One course that I tested was a classic figure-8 track, and after the cars got spread out a bit, there were expected T-bone crashes to endure. Even the straight-up racing portions have cars tapping on each other's fenders and attempts to spin out opponents on turns.

▲ Tracks are wide enough to encourage passing, but the driving is wild enough to encourage...uh, incidents.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Dirt Showdown*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ The variety forces you to build different skills to succeed
- ❤ Looks as good as *Dirt 3*

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Sometimes the camera can be your enemy
- ✖ Hate to think this delays Codemasters making *Dirt 4*

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We gave The Darkness II a score of 4/5 last month so if you haven't copped this title. Now's your chance to save $10 when you pick it up. Of course, Xbox gamers are gonna want to check out this $25 off coupon for Tritton's Primer Wireless Stereo Headset for Xbox 360. **And while you're in the store, don't forget to sign up for Best Buy's Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked so you never miss an issue.**

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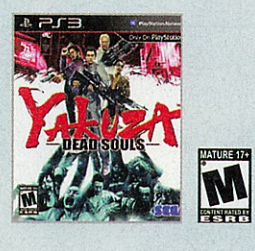
01 THE DARKNESS II

The Darkness II is an intense first-person shooter that delivers a twisted and gripping narrative of tragedy, modern crime drama, and supernatural horror. Players will be taken down the brutal and personal path of Jackie Estacado, head of a New York crime family and wielder of an ancient and ruthless force of chaos and destruction known as The Darkness.



02 YAKUZA: DEAD SOULS

The streets of Tokyo swarm with sinners of every flavor. But the latest arrivals come from the world of the undead. But these undead invaders clearly haven't met the Yakuza. Buck up, gear up and rejoin the ranks of the grittiest gang in Japan — it's time to bulldoze those zombies back into the ground.

03 METROID OTHER M AND SIN & PUNISHMENT 2: STAR SUCCESSOR

Picking up where *Super Metroid* ended, Samus begins telling her own tale. This personal story is what drives *Metroid: Other M*.

In this sequel to the Japanese Nintendo 64 cult classic *Sin and Punishment*, you'll find yourself fighting waves of enemies in a twisted post-apocalyptic environment packed with continuous action.

04 STEEL DIVER AND PILOTWINGS RESORT

Plunge deep into the ocean for a seaworthy adventure as a sub commander in Steel Diver.

Pilotwings Resort picks you up off of your feet for a 3D adventure high in the air. Import your very own Mii from the Mii Maker, then zoom into Mission mode to prove your piloting prowess and earn stars.

05 PRE-OWNED HOMEFRONT

Take the front lines alongside the colorful characters of the Resistance as you employ daring guerrilla tactics, commandeer military vehicles and unleash epic warfare across sprawling battlefields with first-person sharpshooting action.

06 PRE-OWNED RESISTANCE 3

This third installment in the Resistance franchise takes place four years after the events of Resistance 2 and joins Capelli as he treks across America from Haven, Oklahoma to New York City. Encounter survivors and remnants left in the wake of the Chimeran invasion on your epic journey.

07 $10 OFF ANY PRE-OWNED GAME $29.99 OR ABOVE

Whether you're finally looking to jump on the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* bandwagon, or just looking to add to your library, don't miss out on $10 off any pre-owned game that's $19.99 or more.

08 TRITTON PRIMER WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET FOR XBOX 360

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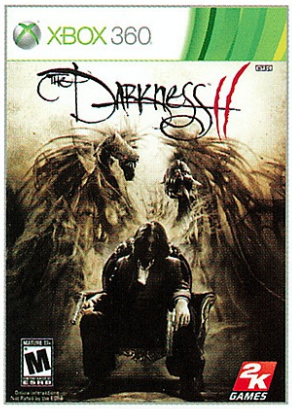
The Darkness II • PS3 & Xbox 360



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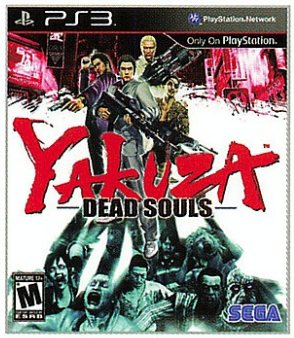

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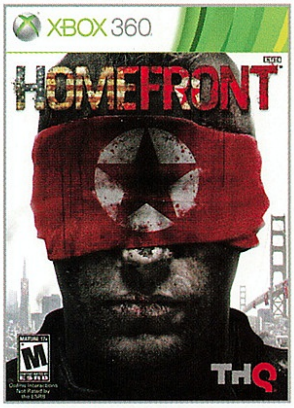

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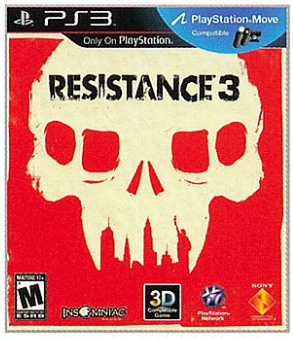

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SLEEPING DOGS

Taking a bite out of the open-world genre • Words: Matt Cabral

Heavily inspired by hard-boiled Hong Kong cinema, *Sleeping Dogs* is an open-world action-adventure that puts its protagonist's fists and feet first. Similar to other sandbox games, it tasks fans of the genre with driving and shooting through story missions and side quests. However, you should plan on spending as much time behind undercover cop Wei Shen's bone-crunching martial arts moves as you will the wheels of sports cars and the barrels of hand cannons.

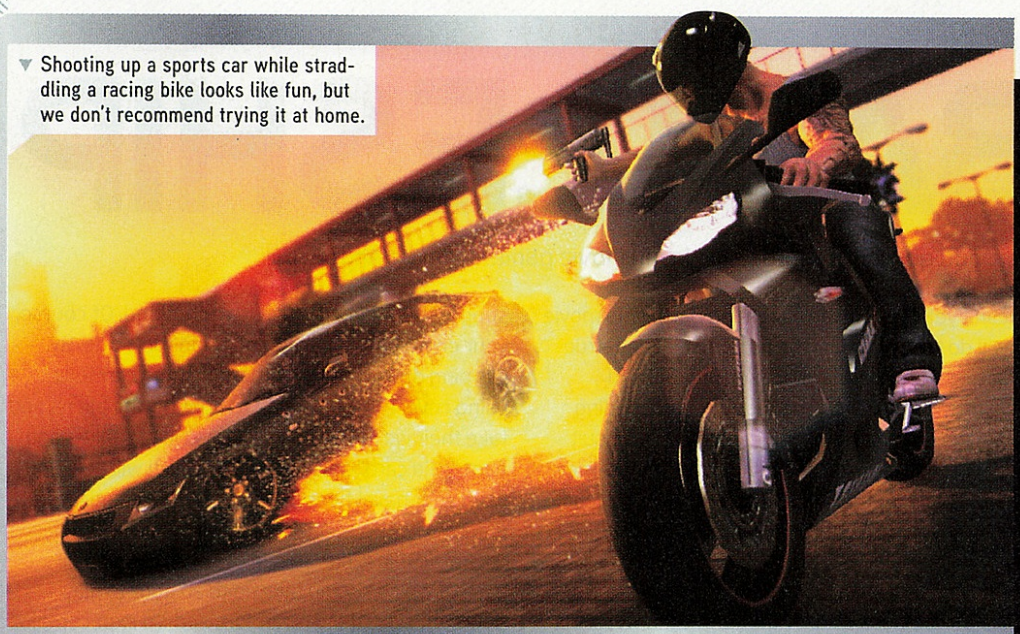
Before getting to bruise Shen's knuckles, though, I was introduced to *Sleeping Dogs*' immersive setting. Opening in a Hong Kong street market, my demo was brought to life by the sound of barking vendors, bustling pedestrians on the move, and fireworks filling the night sky. Complemented by a vibrant visual palette and realistic character animations, the world feels much livelier than the ghost towns that too often pass for cities in similar games.

Of course, Shen's not here to shop or go sightseeing. Upon confronting a character he's sent to "interrogate," he's led on a foot chase that showcases his free-running skills. Pushing people aside, navigating staircases and through alleyways, and vaulting over objects, Shen displays the grace of an Olympic gymnast. Slowed by a group of unsavory individuals, he's finally allowed to let the leash off his lethal limbs.

Utilizing face button-mapped light and heavy strikes, counters, and grapples, I slip into a satisfying combat rhythm evocative of *Batman: Arkham City*'s combo-based brawls. As beautiful as they are brutal, Shen's moves yield a variety of teeth-shattering, femur-fracturing animations. But it's not until I begin dragging stunned enemies into glowing environmental objects that I truly get a sense of his intolerance for street thugs. From face-shredding fan blades to skull-crushing car doors, *Sleeping Dogs* is brimming with opportunities for Shen to finish off foes in stomach-churning style.

While I witnessed just a handful of these pain-bringers, they had a lasting impact. I'm having an especially hard time erasing the image of a man's chest being crushed by an engine block; the screams of another unfortunate victim, fed into a circular table-saw, aren't easy to shake either. I look forward to discovering more about its shooting and driving mechanics, but the promise of creatively silencing more chumps has already sold me on *Sleeping Dogs*' potential to stand out from the open-world pack.

SHEN'S FINALLY ALLOWED TO LET THE LEASH OFF HIS LETHAL LIMBS



▼ Shooting up a sports car while straddling a racing bike looks like fun, but we don't recommend trying it at home.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

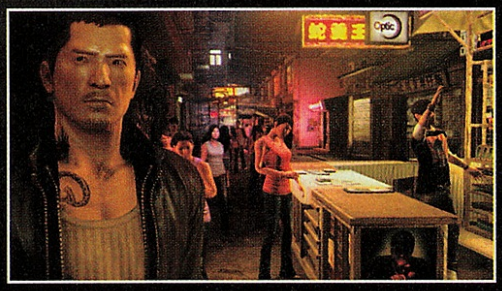
Originally titled *True Crime: Hong Kong*, *Sleeping Dogs* was renamed when Activision canceled the project and Square Enix subsequently picked it up. I caught up with executive producer Stephen van der Mescht, who describes what's behind the new—and cooler—title: "It was a tough process, but obviously it needed to be rebranded. It comes from the proverb 'Let sleeping dogs lie,' because...well, you know what will happen if you wake the dog. Obviously, trouble...you can get bitten. It refers to our main character as well as the organizations he's involved with."

GAMEPLAY \\

▲ You won't take to the skies, but *Sleeping Dogs* promises plenty of high-speed action on land and sea.

▲ *Sleeping Dogs*' cinematic brawls are accompanied by bone-crunching sound effects and blood-spitting animations.

▲ Taking out baddies behind fast feet and fists is a blast, but sometimes you just need to unload a few thousand rounds.

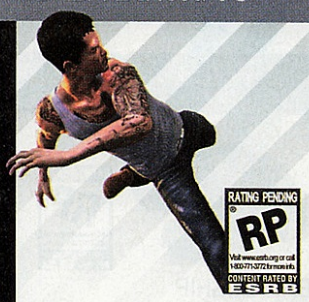


▲ The action movie-themed gameplay is supported by a twisty narrative inspired by the same cinematic source.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON



SLEEPING DOGS

INFO
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: United Front Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Those who'd rather leave broken bones than empty bullet casings in their wake

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Batman: Arkham City's satisfying combat and detailed open world should prepare you.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Sleeping Dogs*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Visceral, responsive melee combat
- ❤ Richly realized Hong Kong setting
- ❤ A fresh take on a tired genre

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Is 2012 big enough for *Sleeping Dogs* and *GTA5*?

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii 3DS DS

BATTLESHIP

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Double Helix (PS3, Xbox 360); Magic Pockets (Wii, 3DS, DS)
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, 3DS, DS

RELEASE DATE
May 15, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-strategy (PS3, Xbox 360); turn-based strategy (Wii, 3DS, DS)

SUITABLE FOR
Board game graduates; movie game mavens

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Might as well bide your time with what may be the ultimate movie game, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Battleship*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ A wild mix of game genres layered on a strategic foundation
- ❤ Randomized maps provide deep replayability

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Sorry, but I didn't see Rihanna or Brooklyn Decker anywhere in my demo!

BATTLESHIP

Hey, you got some board game in my movie game! • Words: Andy Eddy

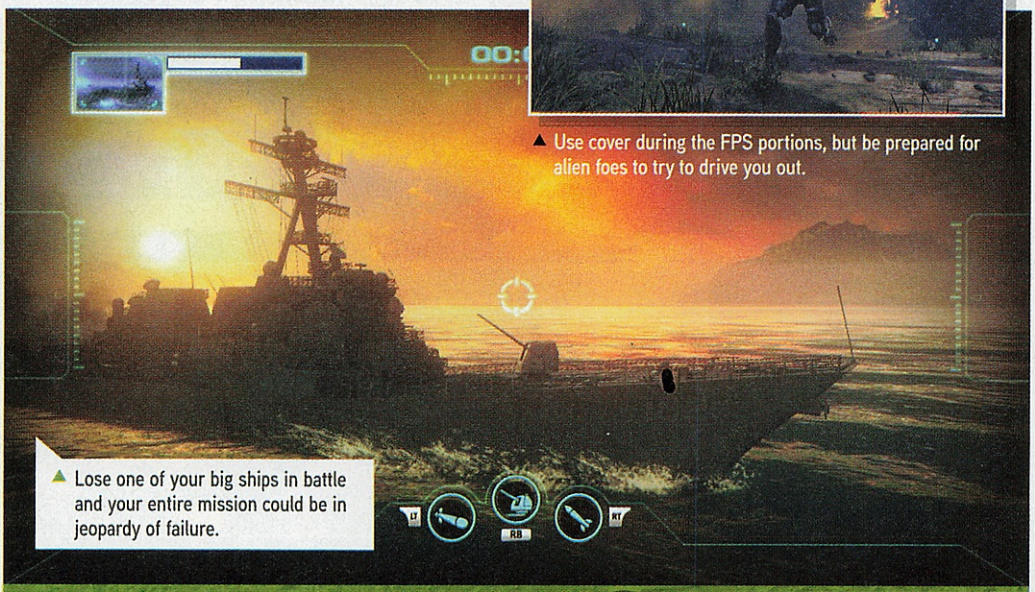
I can't yet say how the upcoming *Battleship* movie will do this summer. The mix of tried-and-true actors—such as Liam Neeson (*Taken*) and Alexander Skarsgård (*True Blood*)—and budding thespians—such as singer Rihanna and swimsuit model Brooklyn Decker—should make things interesting. But I'm not here to debate the film. Instead, I'm giving you a peek at Activision's upcoming *Battleship* games.

They may be based on a movie that, in turn, is based on the classic board game, but the work-in-progress interactives are going to be much more than alternating guesses of where your opponent hid their ships. An early demo showed me a videogame with high doses of first-person shooting, ship-to-ship tactics, and a strategic card game, all with the aim to drive off the alien forces that are trying to take over Earth.

Using the Battlecomm map to plan out skirmishes, you need to try to amass the critical support positions that circle each island. Of course, your enemies are also trying to do the same. By jumping down into the FPS mode (and carefully using cover), you'll be able to fight off the aliens and take their weapons, as well as call in airstrikes and earn "wild card" abilities—all of which will help you keep your naval fleet sailing and your islands free of aliens.

Battleship is comprised of seven missions, each of which should take up to an hour to play. However, everything is randomized, so expect major replayability. The games are due out in mid-May—right before the film hits theaters—giving you plenty of time to practice your saddest "Awww, you sunk my battleship!"

▲ Use cover during the FPS portions, but be prepared for alien foes to try to drive you out.

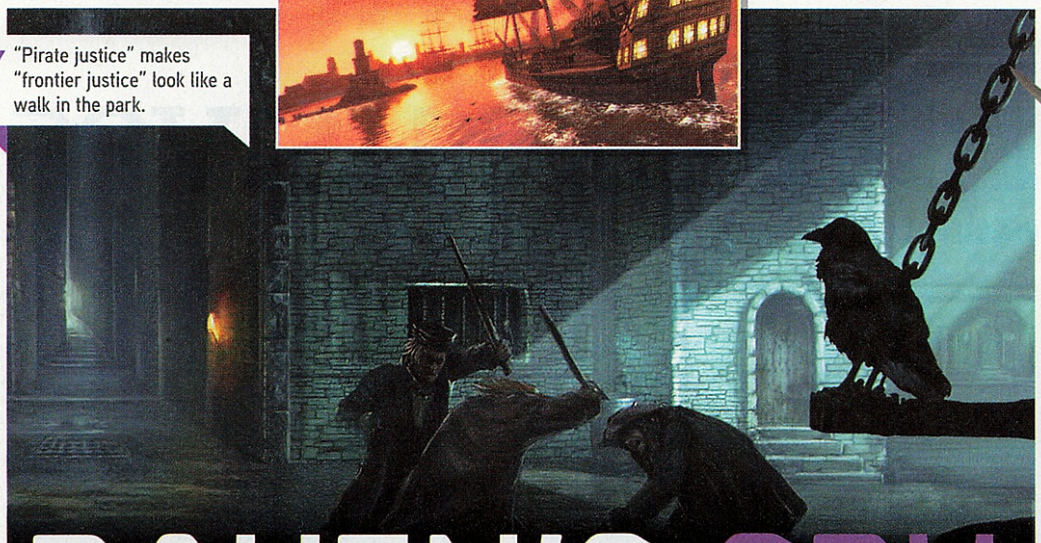


▲ Lose one of your big ships in battle and your entire mission could be in jeopardy of failure.

NINTENDO NAUTICALS

The Wii, 3DS, and DS versions are also based off the *Battleship* movie, but within Story Mode the action is top-down strategy similar to the original board game. You still need to save the world from attacking aliens, but you do it using your destroyers, frigates, patrol boats, submarines, and, of course, battleships. Successful gameplay unlocks new maps and naval officers for use later in the game's Skirmish Mode.

▼ "Pirate justice" makes "frontier justice" look like a walk in the park.



RAVEN'S CRY

Meet the real pirates of the Caribbean • Words: Ryan Scott

TopWare Interactive's pitch for upcoming pirate-themed action-adventure *Raven's Cry* is a simple one: It throws out the Disney trappings of most modern pirate tales, instead spinning a dark and bloody story of what life *really* might have been like in the Caribbean.

To me, it's like looking at piracy tropes through a George R. R. Martin lens (that's *Game of Thrones*, for the fantasy-starved): The opening cut-scene shows us how a young Christopher Raven's life was turned upside down after his island home was ransacked by pirates, his parents brutally murdered before his eyes, and his hand severed. Fast forward a couple decades or so, and Raven has become a bitter, bloodthirsty man himself, chasing rumors of one Neville Scranton—the man who led the life-changing raid—and single-mindedly seeking some good old-fashioned revenge.

As you guide Raven toward his quarry, your activities chiefly revolve around extracting information from the obligatory unsavory types; a rudimentary alignment system poses conversation choice like "Gun" and "Knife" (and, once you're done with that chat, "Door" or "Lantern"). This gray-hued morality system highlights what a dangerous character Raven is—a reputation that his combat pragmatism only serves to reinforce. Outside of the central melee swordplay routine (combos ahoy!), limited-use firearms encourage dirty-fighting tactics (such as lighting up flammable barrels to preemptively take out would-be baddies), and magical charms enable Raven to inflict fear and other advantageous ailments. This is one pirate you definitely don't want to cross!

GOONIES NEVER SAY DIE! \\

▲ Sit down with this guy, and your conversation choices are "Gun" and "Knife." Guess what those do?

▲ Sword, check. Cool coat, check. Hook hand that you can swap out for a *straight razor*, check.

PREPARE TO BE BOARDED \\

Raven's Cry is still early in development, and one of the activities that's sure to interest pirate connoisseurs—ship-to-ship naval combat—remains curiously absent. However, developer Octane Games is a spin-off brand of parent company Nitro Games, perhaps best known for 2009's *East India Company*. Real-time naval combat figured heavily into this one, so who knows what might crop up?

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

RAVEN'S CRY

INFO
Publisher: TopWare Interactive
Developer: Octane Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBD

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone looking for a dark and gritty pirate story

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

LucasArts' *The Secret of Monkey Island* is still the best pirate game of all time!

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

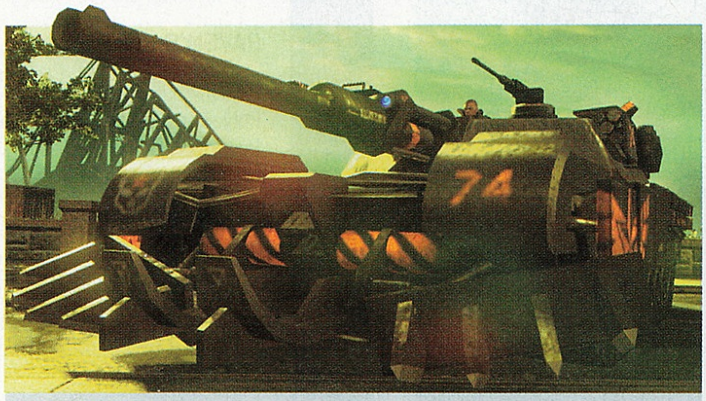
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Raven's Cry*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Serious, violent pirate tale that strays far from Disney territory
- ❤ Gray-and-grey morality system

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ No word yet on exactly what the nautical combat might look like

Pre-Order Exclusives

↘ Check out these special offers on upcoming games, available by pre-ordering now!



PROTOTYPE 2

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Radical Entertainment • Release Date: April 24, 2012

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Pre-order the regular or Blackwatch Collector's Edition of *Prototype 2* on PS3 or Xbox 360, and get an exclusive hardened steel vehicle armor bonus and a limited-edition, double-sided 18" x 24" collectible poster.

THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS

Publisher: WBIE • Developer: CD Projekt RED • Release Date: April 17, 2012

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

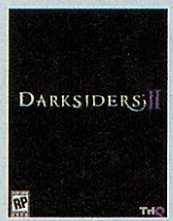
Pre-order the Enhanced or Dark editions of *The Witcher 2* on Xbox 360 and receive an exclusive *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* t-shirt.

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Publisher: 2K Games • Developer: Yager Development • Release Date: June 26, 2012

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Pre-order *Spec Ops: The Line* on PS3, Xbox 360, or PC and receive a free upgrade to the FUBAR Pack, which includes double XP for one week, the Clan Accessory Pack, and unlocks the AK47 and Office Class at Rank One.



DARKSIDERS II

Publisher: THQ • Developer: Vigil Games • Release Date: June 26, 2012

RATING PENDING RP

Pre-order *Darksiders II* for PS3, Xbox 360, or PC and get the exclusive Angel of Death Pack, which includes a set of armor, a pair of stylish scythes, and a unique visual effect for your trusty crow, Dust.

@GAMER
DIGITAL EDITION

MORE SCREENS
01 SEARCH
The gun-toting dude at the end of the hall isn't a threat, but those dancing laser sights look potentially dangerous.
NVIDIA 3D VISION
MORE SCREENS
01 SEARCH
02 DESTROY
Triggering bullet time will allow Max to systematically take out the snipers before finishing off the hall-dwelling cop in slow-mo style.
IT'S STORYTIME!
SOUTH AMERICA NOIR
While filling fossils full of holes takes center stage, Max Payne 3 still finds time to spin a dramatic yarn. Sticking close to its film noir roots, it uses a variety of methods to tell its well-paced tale; motion comics, cut-scenes, and Max's monologues combine to get both your heart and trigger fingers revolving in time. Of course, it doesn't hurt that veteran Payne voice actor, James McCaffrey, gives weight to Max's waxing.
TWISTY TIMELINE
MAX'S MATRIX-LIKE MOVES
SHOWER TIME
MAX PAYNE 3 STILL FINDS TIME TO SPIN A DRAMATIC YARN
GAME DETAILS
MAX PAYNE 3
RELEASE DATE
March 2012
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
GENRE
Third-person shooter
SUITABLE FOR
TAP TO PREORDER
WATCH VIDEO
WHAT'S GREAT:
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
Qosmio
harman/kardon
TOSHIBA

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We have pulled the best screenshots from our archives.

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS
Game trailers and quick updates from the editors

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▶ To say that Sgt. James Heller is being mentored by Alex Mercer is perverting their relationship.

EXCLUSIVE - REVIEW!

[PROTOTYPE® 2]

A new hero, a new story...but the same brutal infection threatening the world • Words: Andy Eddy

If you played 2009's *Prototype* and came away feeling like I did, you found an open-world action game with lots of promise, but one that became overcomplicated by its design and which pounded you more and more relentlessly the deeper you got into it.

Activision and developer Radical Entertainment spent the last two-plus years poring over gamer and media feedback about the first game, dedicated to making a sequel that's better and more playable.

The resulting *Prototype 2* has many of the same elements of the first game, with a main protagonist (Sgt. James Heller) who's infected, but using his superhuman powers to brutally find the infection's cause. He's also less, in Radical's own words, "whiny" than Alex Mercer was in the original. The sequel is also designed to more gradually lead you into using each power you acquire, with button prompts showing up at key moments to remind you how to complete a certain action (and, hint, right before you should use that action).

While some of the gameplay is repetitive leading up to the game's climactic fight, I found myself more engaged throughout *Prototype 2*. And the story was much more compelling and interesting, so my motivation was much clearer. (I was more entertained, too; see "The Story" sidebar).

Between the main story-based gameplay and the side missions, you'll be busy for close to two dozen hours. It was hard for me to put down when I had to take a break. I guess you could say *Prototype 2* infected me.

A SEQUEL
THAT'S BETTER
AND MORE
PLAYABLE
SPECIAL
OFFER
This Issue FREE
when you pre-order
Prototype 2
(offer available in-store only,
while supplies last)

▶ Heller shows his "handlers" what he can do in a room full of Infected. No, I wouldn't call the fire a homey touch.

Never Again... Heller wants to avoid ending up back on the table. Can you help?

[THE STORY]

Don't hit Start to skip these cut-scenes

To anyone who meets him, Sgt. James Heller is the prototypical soldier: confident (bordering on cocky) and steely when he needs to be. Indeed, he needs to be that often, working for the military that's trying to keep the infection that's ravaged New York Zero from spreading outside of its borders.

But inside the uniform is a broken man—and, worse, reckless. After he returns home to find his wife a plague casualty and his young daughter missing, he takes the worst assignments, knowing that he has nothing to lose but his life...and when he loses that, he's planning to take down as many disease carriers as he can.

That's how *Prototype 2* begins, but before you take control, you witness Heller's final indignity: His squad gets decimated and he's the only survivor. Alex Mercer "appears" at the scene, so Heller tries to kill the one he believes destroyed his life, but he can't counter Mercer's mutant skills. Mercer, however, sees that Heller could be a more-than-capable minion, so he infects Heller, says why Blackwatch is to blame, and sends Heller off to set things right.

While it's a classic storyline, it'll take you through some surprising twists along the way—and reveal some curious cracks in Heller's take-no-prisoners attitude.

AN EXPERIMENT \\

After being infected, Heller awakens and realizes he's being tested like a lab rat. The locked room becomes his UFC octagon, and he has to quickly flex his offensive and defensive muscles. (It's also a combat tutorial for you.)

▲ Mercer surveys the damage that he has wrought on NYZ...or has he? Heller will find the truth...or will he?

▲ As the game progresses, Heller relishes each new power, but getting comfortable in his new skin is tougher.

01

02

[RADNET]

Free competitive content for a limited time

While *Prototype 2* has no multiplayer component, it offers some competitive content in the form of Radnet events. According to Activision, Radnet content is going to be free of charge for anyone who pre-orders the game and those who buy the version that includes a Radnet code, which are going to be in limited supply. After that (or to those who get the game used), there'll be a small fee to access it.

Radnet events are like separate, diverse games you play outside the story missions. Some are races past a number of rooftop checkpoints; some require flying a helicopter through an obstacle course; some have you collecting biohazard barrels one at a time and throwing them into an incinerator; and others have you chase the highest melee score by fighting baddies. Activision will also supplement them with weekly events it'll offer through June 7.

There are also other challenges that you can take on at any time, such as getting the most kills with a certain weapon or the longest time aloft in a single leap.

So, while you're not competing directly, each event or challenge is timed/scored/counted and put on a leaderboard, so you'll be able to see how you're doing against friends and others playing *Prototype 2*.

01
Heller gets around by propelling himself through the air. It's like accelerated gliding, and can be upgraded.

02
Heller's knife is useless against Mercer, but he's a soldier and can't stand idly by in the face of a threat.

01
After he's had a number of upgrades, Heller cuts a menacing figure...and cuts lots of other things as well.

02
The blade weapon is powerful. "Charging" it spins Heller forward, slicing through whatever's in his path.

▲ Tendrils were my favorite weapon—they're great for taking out nearby helicopters.

Strike Team
Cause enough mayhem and a chopper party will come to kill you.

◀ Larger Infected are consistent in their movement and combat. Discover their patterns and live longer.

Beast Feast
Consuming a large creature adds a lot back to your health bar.

[WEAPONS]

So many ways to kill things, you'll have a hard time choosing

Okay, no one wants to be infected with a life-threatening virus, but you have to admit that, if it turned you into someone who's the walking equivalent of a Swiss Army knife with otherworldly strength, it'd probably be pretty cool to show off.

Heller suffered a nasty fate after his meeting with Mercer, but when he gets control of his skills and garners new ones, there's not much that can stand in his way. There are some weapons that work better in certain situations, but mostly it's up to you to go with whatever arms (in the literal sense) you want to use to take on the infected throng.

And then you also have the ability to upgrade your weapons (by completing missions, leveling up by earning experience points, or by finding and clearing certain locations), as well as other aspects you'll need to survive, such as locomotion, health-bar length, and health regeneration.

As for the actual weapons, there's a lot of personal preference involved, as well as understanding when one weapon is better than another—in some cases, there's a clear choice. I really liked the tendrils as a ranged weapon, and when it's fully upgraded, it reaches out like an octopus, grabs cars and other debris, then slams them all into the target for big damage. The hammerfist is helpful when you're in a crowd, because you can jump clear of a threat (especially one behind you), charge the weapon, and then deliver a damaging radius of spikes.

Frankly, I usually hit a point where I end up mesmerized by what I can do in an open-world game, and *Prototype 2* is no different. When you have your abilities amply upgraded, it's a blast to take to the streets and go nuts with each of your weapons. It pays to become familiar with how they work, particularly the delays that the charged weapons have before they fire off.

THE WALKING EQUIVALENT OF A SWISS ARMY KNIFE

▲ Despite becoming a virus-induced bioweapon himself, Heller can pick up any gun a soldier might leave behind.

[THE ENEMIES]

This is one killer baseball team...and, boy, can they hit!

Prototype 2 is a cool sandbox with plenty of things to throw around or smash, and tons of places to throw or smash them. But I'm sure you're in it for the combat, which requires you to meet some adversaries now and again.

At the lowest level are the basic diseased citizens, which don't do much damage individually, but can bring it in a pack. Hardly anything can climb a wall, so you almost always have a way out of danger by scaling a building. Of course, that's not going to help you as much if you have helicopters on your six. Find a secluded spot to shape-shift, and it'll lessen your problems.

Soldiers are your next level, with their various weapons—and some of them man the rooftops near their military bases. So you're not always safe on roofs, though any troops there are usually fewer in number.

The bigger creatures are more active and pack more of a wallop when they hit. Here, you'll need to use some tactics. Analyze what they do when, and look for button-press hints from the game. Try not to just destroy creatures, though, because consuming an injured one provides a lot of beneficial...uh, nutrition.

And you can't forget you have to meet your "maker"...

BIRDS OF "PRAY" \\

When you cross paths with these birds, they're usually in a pack and you're usually in a helicopter. Turning a chopper to aim is slower, so use target lock to home in on the nearest threat, one at a time. That should enable you to thin their ranks—which is better than praying they don't kill you.

▶ Truer words were never spoken: The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Now, make it fall down *really* hard.

▲ It's not so shocking when this pops up. That it grabs some pavement and wings it at you is more surprising.

▲ "Surprise, boys. I'm really hungry and just ordered myself a double. Hold the pickles!"

▲ Oh, great...these nasties usually travel in packs. Be sure you're always moving, so you're harder to hit.

TAKE TO THE STREETS AND GO NUTS WITH YOUR WEAPONS

01
Heller looks almost normal, just using fists to take out the Blackwatch goons. Later, he takes Blackwatch guys apart...literally.

02
Heller in better days—a capable, by-the-book war hero. That changes after he comes home to find his wife dead and his daughter missing.

01

02

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PROTOTYPE 2

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
April 24, 2012
(PC: July 24, 2012)

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Alex Mercer followers, zombie-killing enthusiasts

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Building up Heller's mobility is fun
- ❤ 'Sploding infected and bad guys is fun

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Mercer is nasty, not fun

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Prototype 2*.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

THE BOOM BOOM ROOM

Looking for big sound on modest dollars? Welcome to the sound bar—glad you could make it • Words: George Jones

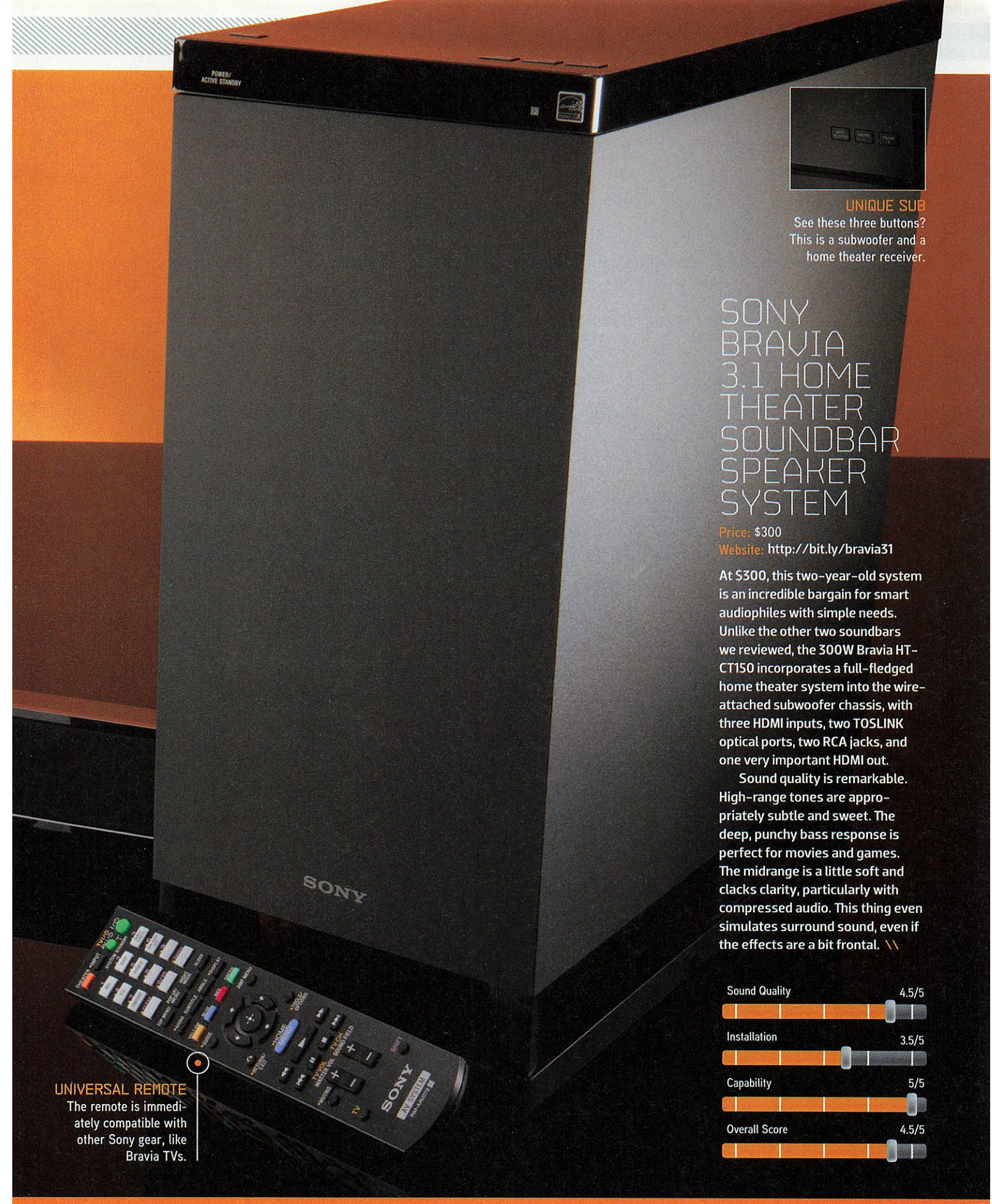
AUDIO SURPRISE
It will surprise you, but this single speaker produces a surprising range of sound.

Speaker size stopped mattering more than 20 years ago, and after spending close to a month with the three speaker systems you're about to read about, I'm beginning to think the same applies to the number of speakers in a system.

If you haven't seen or heard one before, a soundbar system (also referred to at the high-end as a sound projector) is capable of delivering a full range of sounds from a slim, narrow, long-ish speaker and a subwoofer.

At their most ambitious levels, these speaker systems are capable of delivering 3D sound or even full Dolby surround sound. Many of these sets also include wireless subwoofers. We can think of numerous room types where putting a soundbar in front of a TV or even mounted on a wall would be preferable to a full-fledged multi-speaker installation, so I decided to test out two new systems in the @Gamer Lab. I chose a midrange soundbar from Klipsch's Energy brand named the Power Bar Elite, and a more value-priced Boston Acoustics system. Both have wireless speakers, which are very handy for speaker placement.

And, just to find out what kind of sound our hard-earned ducats would buy in terms of yesterday's tech, I got my hands on Sony's Bravia HT-CT150 Home Theater System. The short answer to the last question is holy cow. But truth be told, we found ourselves mighty surprised by all three set-ups.



UNIQUE SUB
See these three buttons? This is a subwoofer and a home theater receiver.

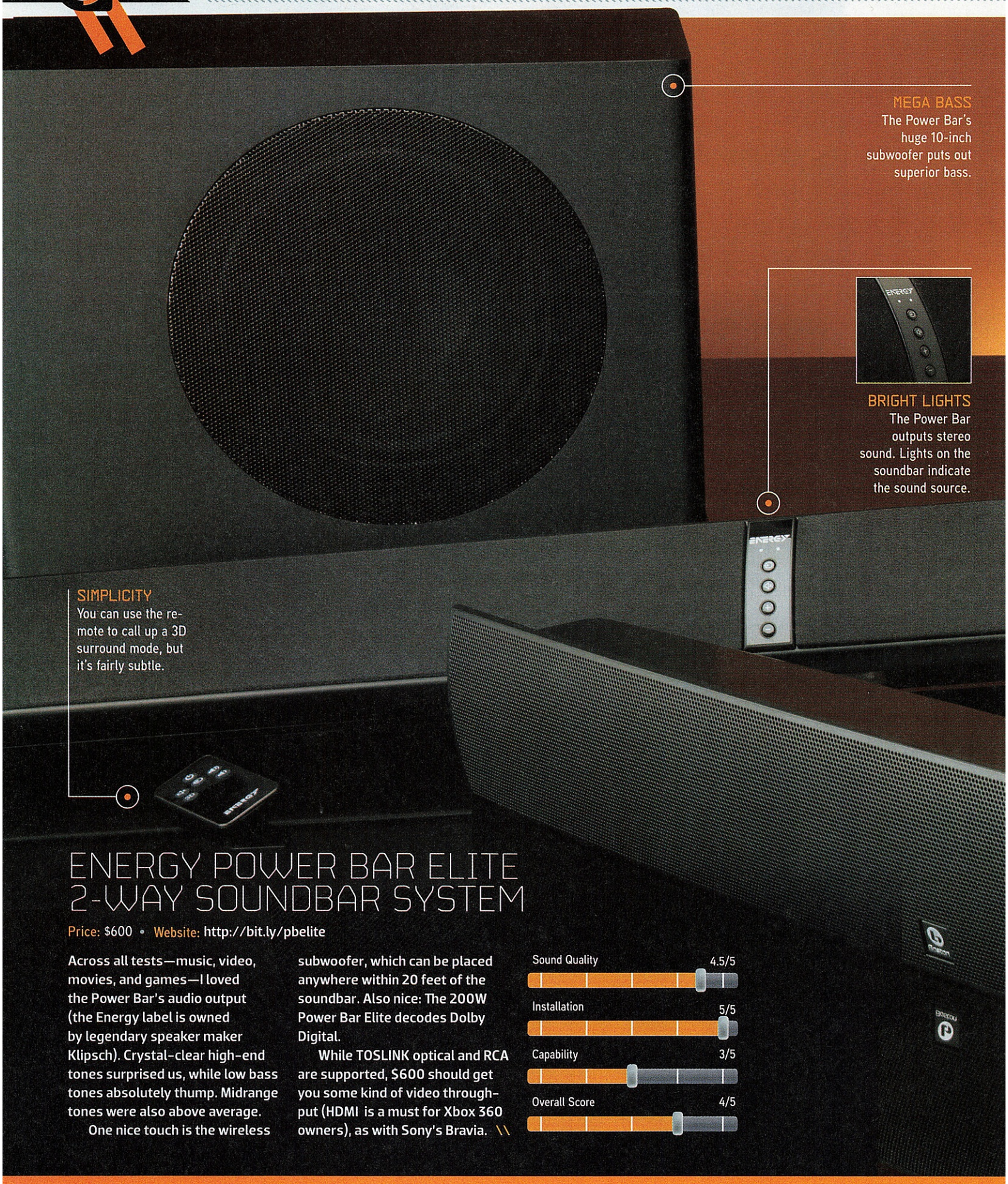
SONY BRAVIA 3.1 HOME THEATER SOUNDBAR SPEAKER SYSTEM

Price: $300
Website: http://bit.ly/bravia31

At $300, this two-year-old system is an incredible bargain for smart audiophiles with simple needs. Unlike the other two soundbars we reviewed, the 300W Bravia HT-CT150 incorporates a full-fledged home theater system into the wire-attached subwoofer chassis, with three HDMI inputs, two TOSLINK optical ports, two RCA jacks, and one very important HDMI out.

Sound quality is remarkable. High-range tones are appropriately subtle and sweet. The deep, punchy bass response is perfect for movies and games. The midrange is a little soft and clacks clarity, particularly with compressed audio. This thing even simulates surround sound, even if the effects are a bit frontal. \\

UNIVERSAL REMOTE
The remote is immediately compatible with other Sony gear, like Bravia TVs.


MEGA BASS
The Power Bar's huge 10-inch subwoofer puts out superior bass.
BRIGHT LIGHTS
The Power Bar outputs stereo sound. Lights on the soundbar indicate the sound source.
SIMPLICITY
You can use the remote to call up a 3D surround mode, but it's fairly subtle.

ENERGY POWER BAR ELITE 2-WAY SOUNDBAR SYSTEM

Price: $600 • Website: http://bit.ly/pbelite

Across all tests—music, video, movies, and games—I loved the Power Bar's audio output (the Energy label is owned by legendary speaker maker Klipsch). Crystal-clear high-end tones surprised us, while low bass tones absolutely thump. Midrange tones were also above average.

One nice touch is the wireless subwoofer, which can be placed anywhere within 20 feet of the soundbar. Also nice: The 200W Power Bar Elite decodes Dolby Digital.

While TOSLINK optical and RCA are supported, $600 should get you some kind of video throughput (HDMI is a must for Xbox 360 owners), as with Sony's Bravia. \\

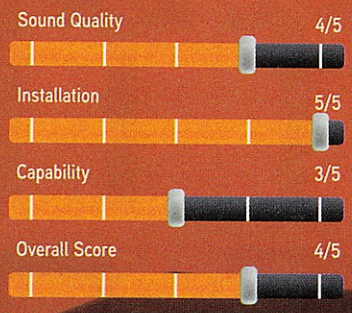
BOSTON ACOUSTICS 2-CHANNEL SOUNDBAR SPEAKER SYSTEM

Price: $350 • Website: http://bit.ly/basoundbar

Amazing. For just $350, you can have great-sounding 2.1 audio that you can sit in front of your TV or mount on the wall underneath it.

Boston Acoustics has been making speakers and home theater kits for a long time, and the company's experience shows here. In our tests, we saw very high-quality high-range reproduction, solid bass response, and good midtones.

Our only gripe is that the soundbar's plastic chassis appears to create a slightly tinny sound. It's not a deal breaker by any account, however. At this price range, this sound system is a great deal. \\



WIRELESS SUB
Boston Acoustics's subwoofer communicates with the soundbar via a 2.4GHz wireless signal.

150W SOUND
Boston Acoustics's soundbar has two 1.5 x 6-inch drivers that put out surprisingly big sound.

CUTTING THE CABLE

We sort through the wealth of streaming video options available on home consoles • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

With the way the economy is right now, everyone's tightening their budgets and looking for ways to save money. When a cable or satellite bill can run around a hundred bucks each month, it's an easy target.

Streaming TV, movies, and sports through your game consoles is a cheap and simple solution to an otherwise expensive problem. Even if you were to subscribe to Netflix, Hulu Plus, and Epix, it'd only set you back a quarter of what your cable bill could. The PS3 and Xbox 360 have individual strengths, and each have services you can't get on the other. ESPN, Epix, and UFC are only available on 360, while MLB TV, NHL Gamecenter Live, and DirecTV's NFL Sunday Ticket are exclusive to the PS3.

As with anything Internet-related, the higher the speed the better the experience. We tested with 6Mb/s DSL from AT&T.

PS3

The PS3 is the king of streaming video with how easily navigable the interfaces are.

- ❤ Across the board better video quality and interfaces; some can be controlled with your TV remote.
- ✖ Some service access is restricted when PSN is down for maintenance.

HULU PLUS

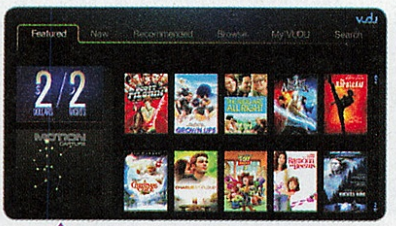
Price: $8 per month

Hulu Plus offers streaming movies like Netflix, but its real claim to fame is streaming episodes of TV shows from current seasons the day after they broadcast. The PS3 has the advantage over the Xbox 360 here with the wealth of video and sound quality options in addition to auto-playing the next episode of whatever show you're watching. Also, the interface is much cleaner and easier to navigate compared to the 360's. I just wish the same commercials wouldn't play at each break during a show.

NETFLIX

Price: $8 per month

Netflix Instant may have gotten its start on the Xbox 360, but it's best on PS3. In 2011 Sony reported the PS3 accounted for more than 30% of total Netflix usage, according to a third-party survey. It's no wonder why, when the navigation is identical to the Netflix Web portal, and video quality is higher and more consistent than on 360. All you need to use Netflix Instant on PS3 is a Netflix account; there's no need for an additional paid online subscription à la Xbox Live Gold.



VUDU

Price: $1-$5 per item

In the streaming game, think of Vudu as a video rental store. Each video or TV series is available à la carte as opposed to Netflix's or Hulu's all-you-can watch. An HD movie is $5 for a rental, owning a movie is around $20. TV shows are purchase-only and are $3 per episode. What Vudu has over its competitors is that you can stream or buy a movie through the service the day it's available on Blu-ray. It also has HBO shows, which other services don't.

HOW PEYTON WATCHES ELI ON SUNDAYS

NEVER MISS A GAME

To use Sunday Ticket you don't even need a DirecTV subscription.

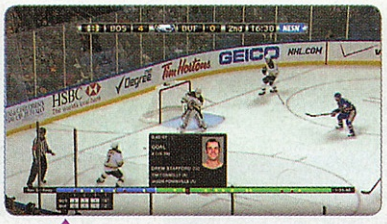
SPORTS TV ON YOUR PS3

While the Xbox 360 has ESPN and UFC, the PS3 is the sports fan's Holy Grail. Besides pro football, hockey, and baseball apps, there's also a slew of college sports packages available, like the SEC Digital Network and XOS College Sports. But all the sports love on Sony's shiny black machine makes the absence of an NBA app all the more glaring.

MLB TV

Price: $110 - $125 per year or $20 - $25 per month

With the boys of summer back, you want MLBTV. If you're a fantasy baseball nut, it could be your ticket to dominating the league, especially if your roster is comprised of out-of-market players. The interface makes finding games easy, and one subscription allows you to watch games on your computer or mobile device, say, if you're at work (not that we condone that). If you want to catch in-market teams play or watch games on-demand, pony up for a Premium subscription for an extra $15 per year.



NHL GAMECENTER LIVE

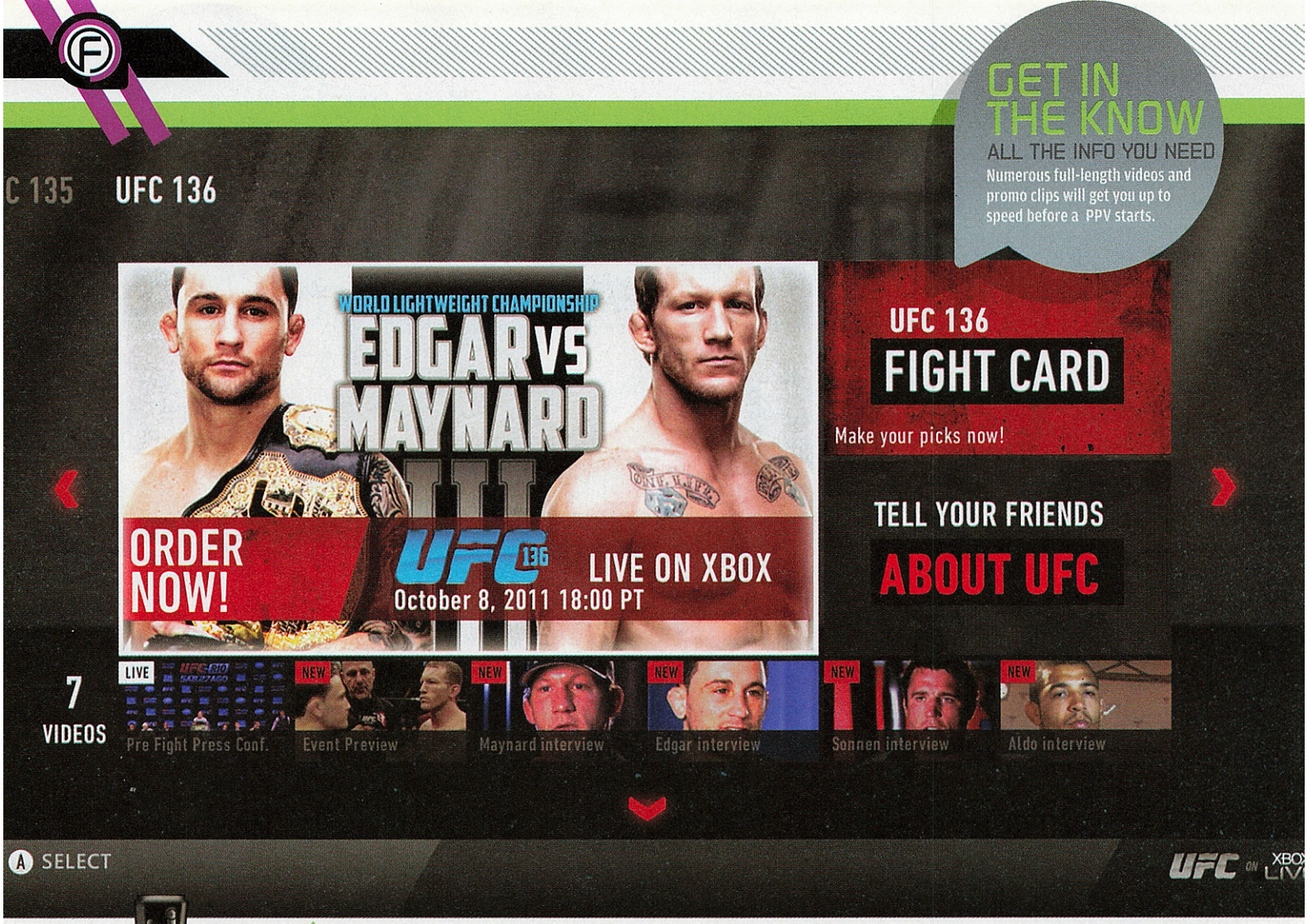
Price: $80 per year

For some, hockey is a religion. For them, the NHL GameCenter app is akin to being able to go to church anytime, anywhere. In addition to watching current games for any team (not just your local team like cable would offer), you have access to games from earlier in the season. What sucks are the 48-hour blackouts. Being able to jump to specific events like key shots or goals during a broadcast or just watch it as you normally would almost makes up for it, though.

DIRECTV NFL SUNDAY TICKET

Price: $300 for DirecTV subscribers with Sunday Ticket package, $340 for non-DirecTV subscribers

Football season will be here before you know it. With it comes a yearning for watching games that aren't broadcast locally. You shouldn't be punished if years of watching the Lions lose made you look for greener football fields. With Sunday Ticket, you have access to up to 14 games each Sunday, but as the name implies, you're only getting Sunday's games: You can't leave cable totally behind if you still want to catch Monday Night Football. However, you do have access to DirecTV's Red Zone channel via your PS3. If you're already a DirecTV subscriber with a Sunday Ticket package ($300), the app is free. Non-subscribers have to fork over an additional $40.



XBOX 360

The Kinect's changed how we interact; voice search and gesture support sometimes make 360 simpler.

- ❤ Voice searching makes finding what you want easier than when using a controller.
- ✖ Resorting to voice search to find anything; the Kinect picking up dialogue from what you're watching.

UFC 360

Price: Free

What's cool about the UFC app on Xbox 360 is how robust it is. Not only can you buy pay-per-views from within the app, you can make and share your picks for who'll win which fights via Facebook. Miss anything leading up to the fight? Don't worry, there's enough content like promo videos and full episodes of UFC Primetime to catch you up.

Pay-per-views have DVR functionality, so if you have to get up and grab a drink or make a run to the bathroom, you can pause it on the spot. Even better is that you can rewatch an event right after it's over. When we watched a PPV the mat was pixelated—even in HD—and quality dropped every now and again, though.

NETFLIX

Price: $8 per month

Like the rest of the video services on Xbox 360, Netflix is hampered by forced integration with Kinect and Microsoft's obsession with its "Metro" stylings. Navigating your queue without a controller is nigh impossible. Voice commands only move back and forth between categories, not left and right to what's in them. Gesture controls are nonexistent, too.

Its sole advantage over the PS3 version is that it offers to play the next episode of a TV show you're watching as the current one finishes.

HULU PLUS

Price: $8 per month

Following the theme of fail, Hulu Plus on 360 is also a convoluted mess. Shows you've subscribed to aren't in your queue, they're unintuitively listed under "favorites." Searches are text only, but at least you can pause, rewind, and fast forward with voice commands.

Video quality was hit-or-miss; episodes of *Community* were fuzzy even though they were in "HD," while new *South Parks* were clear as a bell. The new Xbox dashboard "Metro" style makes Hulu the hardest of all to navigate.

CRACKLE

Price: Free

If you aren't a stickler for HD video, Crackle's great. This free app has a huge swath of content on rotation, ranging from anime to movies like *Talladega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby* and *Reign Over Me*. That ads have better quality than most video does is crazy, though.

EPIX

Price: $10 per month

Epix is a streaming service from the premium cable channel company by the same name. What it lacks in exclusive programming is made up for with its easy-to-navigate design. Video quality is good and finding what you want to watch is simple.

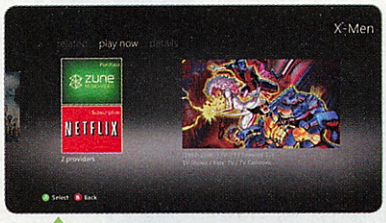
ESPN

Price: $10 per month

One thing making it hard to leave cable behind is ditching ESPN. How else will you watch SportsCenter or catch the latest NHRA race? Right here. Access to your favorite sports is just a few clicks away and you can even watch last winter's X Games if you missed 'em.

DOWNGRADING THE STREAM ON YOUR 360

When Microsoft updated the dashboard last winter with its Windows 8 "Metro" style, it made everything on the Xbox 360 harder to navigate without Kinect. Video quality was a sacrificial lamb as well. The biggest victim was black levels: Instead of inky shadows and dark scenes, everything turned a light shade of gray. The other was 1080p streaming for anything other than Zune video content. Microsoft has acknowledged this terrible side-effect, but as of press time it was unresolved.



STREAMING DASH

Price: Free

You can use your 360 as a Windows Media Center extender to stream content from your PC to your TV. It's buggy and sluggish, though. Be warned. You could spend an afternoon troubleshooting finicky audio and video codecs and still not have it work.

YOUTUBE

Price: Free

When it was first announced, YouTube on 360 sounded like a great idea. In practice, it barely functions. You can't subscribe to channels or create playlists and navigating a channel with lots of content is a pain. With updates, the execution could match the promise.

CHECK OUT THESE OTHER TV APPS

What started with Netflix has expanded to over a dozen services across the two HD consoles. Whether it's news or movie clips or downloads, your console has you covered. Best Buy Cinema Now and Zune Video offer additional video choices if you're missing out on something from the other services.

BEST BUY CINEMA NOW

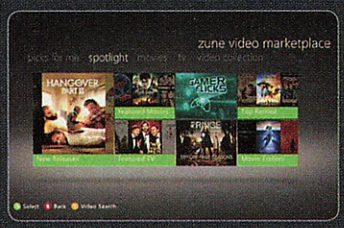
Watch movies that are still in theaters and TV shows the day after they air with this service.

TODAY

Miss Matt Lauer eviscerating an interview subject this morning? Catch it here.

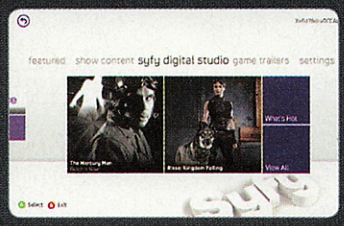
ZUNE VIDEO

Watch trailers, rent and buy movies, buy season passes or individual episodes with Microsoft points.



SYFY

Clips and webisodes are the name of this SyFy app's game. No full episodes here, though.



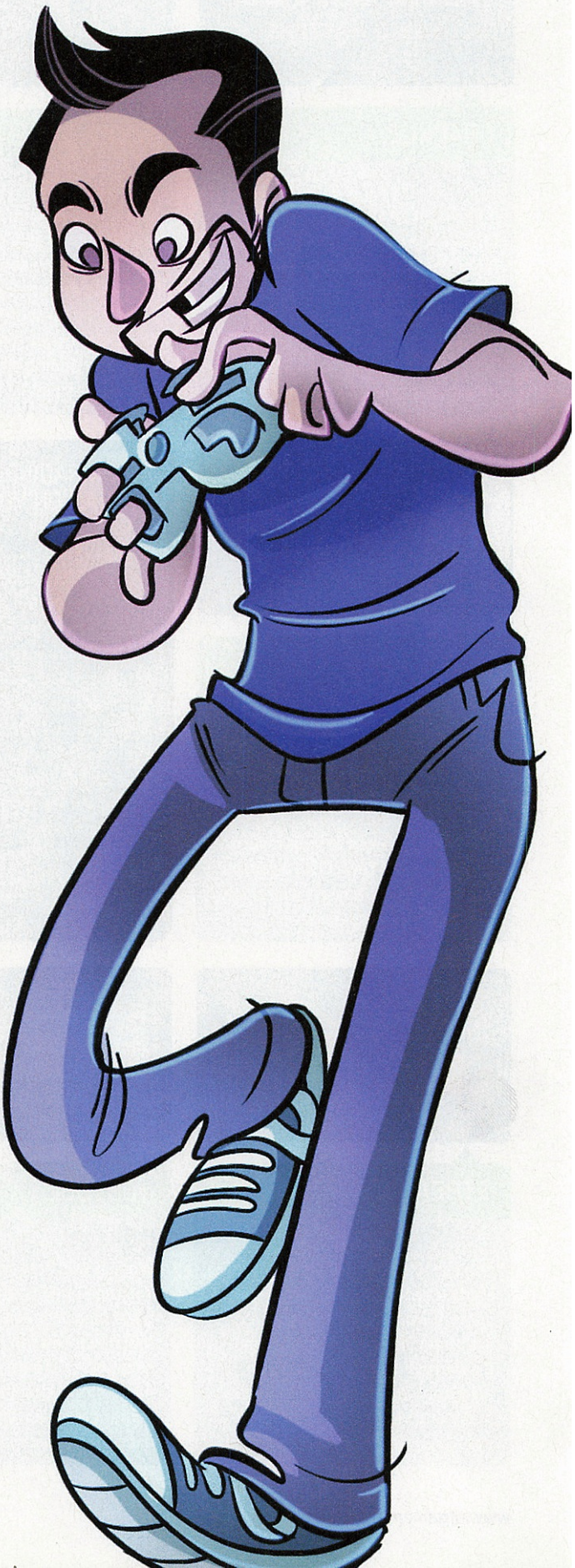
DAILY MOTION

Daily Motion brings in video from the web including gaming videos from *The Escapist* like Unskippable.

You might know **Joshua**.
He loves video games, and he owns enough to know they're not all meant for kids. That's why he reminds his friends (at least the ones that have kids) that they all have **big black letters on the box** to help parents find the ones that are best for their families.

You can learn about those ratings at **ESRB.org**

Los Angeles, CA



ESRB ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE 10+ E10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

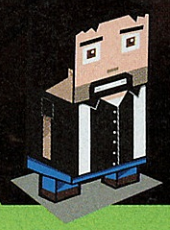
Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

62 NINJA GAIDEN 3

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

Commander Shepard, Sweet Tooth, and Ryu Hayabusa start scuffling. Who comes out on top?



David Chapman

Shepard stared down the greatest threats in the known universe without blinking. Think he's going to be scared of some circus clown and a guy who wears jammies in public?

Chuck Osborn

Sweet Tooth reveals that his ice cream truck is really a sentient Reaper, which immediately dispatches both Shepard and Ryu, leaving clown boy to drive off laughing.

Ryan Scott

Hayabusa stinks (though it could just be because I play on Ninja Dog difficulty), and Sweet Tooth is a '90s has-been. Shepard (the female version, thank you) has these suckers beat.

Timothy J. Seppala

Ryu Hayabusa. Like a nasty case of indigestion—fast, silent, and deadly. He has a wicked airborne spinning piledriver, too. Shepard and Sweet Tooth don't stand a chance.

TOP PICKS

58 MASS EFFECT 3
62 NINJA GAIDEN 3
65 NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM GENERATIONS
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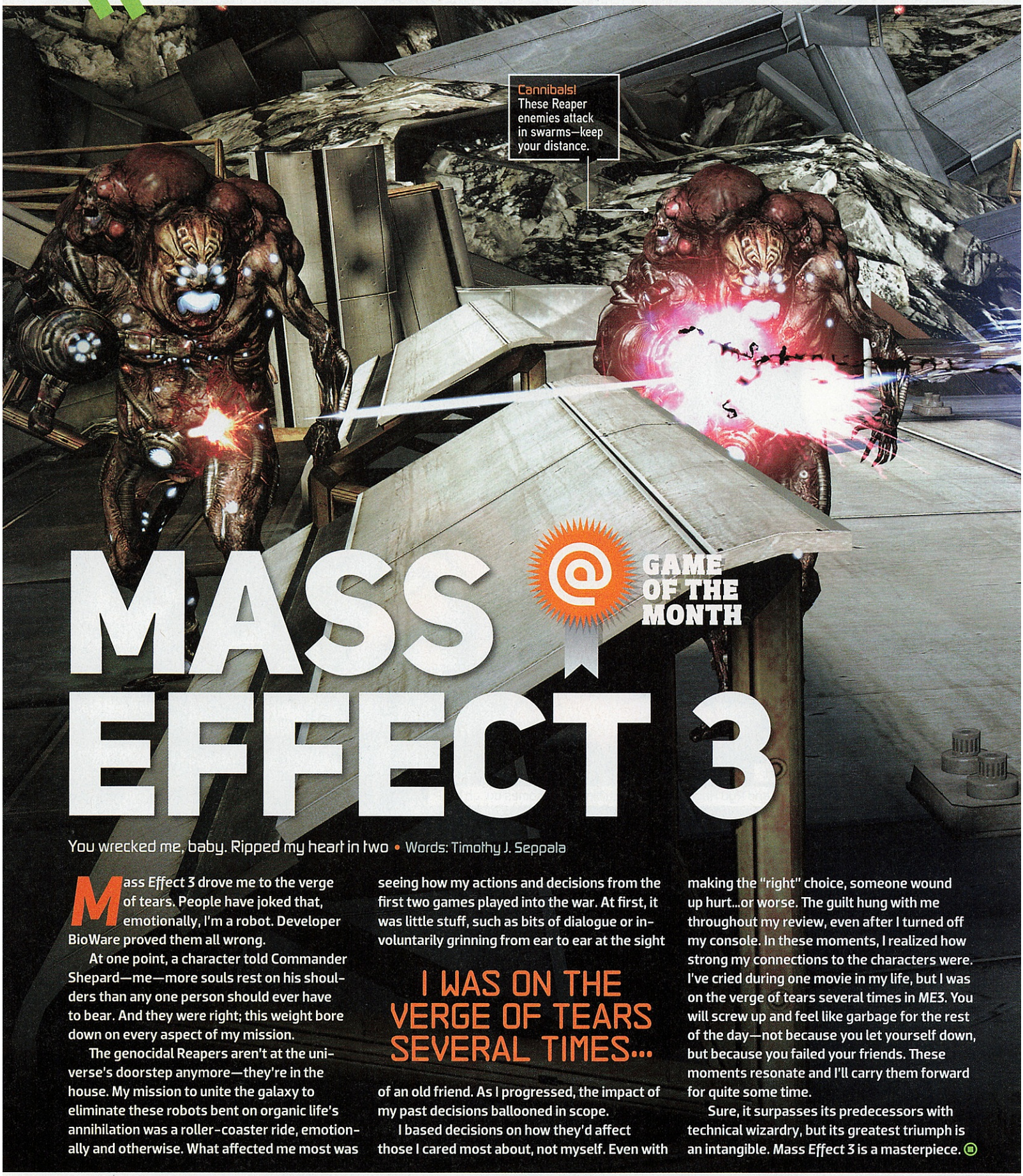
81 Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games
81 Zumba Fitness Rush
81 NeverDead

NOT PICKS

There weren't any games that didn't make the *@GAMER* cut this issue!



MASS EFFECT 3

GAME OF THE MONTH

You wrecked me, baby. Ripped my heart in two • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Mass Effect 3 drove me to the verge of tears. People have joked that, emotionally, I'm a robot. Developer BioWare proved them all wrong.

At one point, a character told Commander Shepard—me—more souls rest on his shoulders than any one person should ever have to bear. And they were right; this weight bore down on every aspect of my mission.

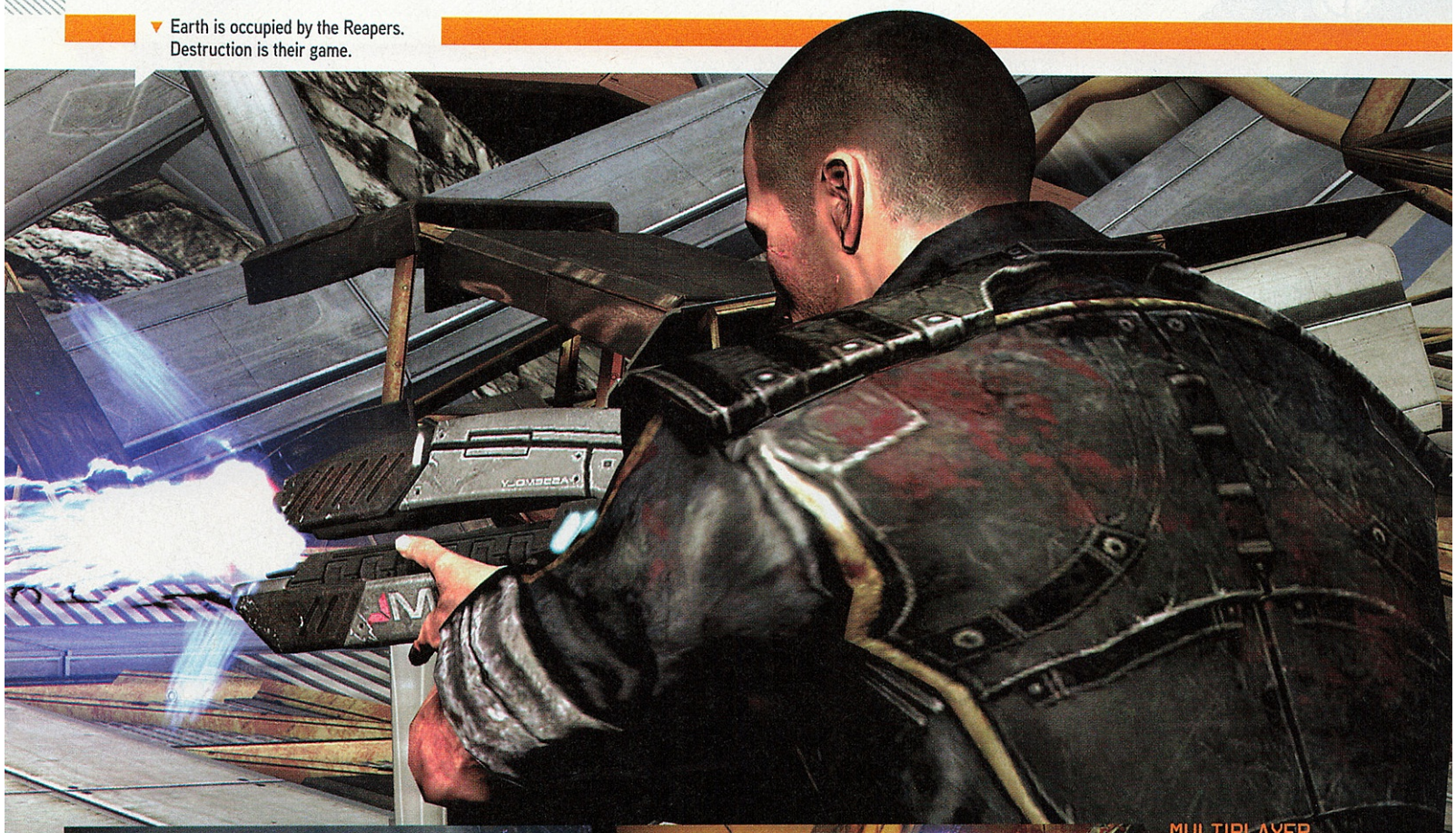
The genocidal Reapers aren't at the universe's doorstep anymore—they're in the house. My mission to unite the galaxy to eliminate these robots bent on organic life's annihilation was a roller-coaster ride, emotionally and otherwise. What affected me most was seeing how my actions and decisions from the first two games played into the war. At first, it was little stuff, such as bits of dialogue or involuntarily grinning from ear to ear at the sight of an old friend. As I progressed, the impact of my past decisions ballooned in scope.

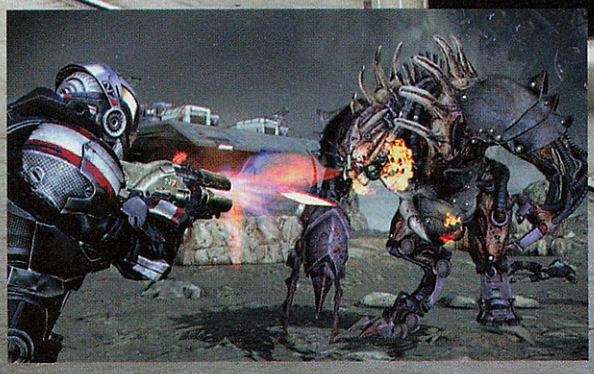
I WAS ON THE VERGE OF TEARS SEVERAL TIMES...

I based decisions on how they'd affect those I cared most about, not myself. Even with making the "right" choice, someone wound up hurt...or worse. The guilt hung with me throughout my review, even after I turned off my console. In these moments, I realized how strong my connections to the characters were. I've cried during one movie in my life, but I was on the verge of tears several times in *ME3*. You will screw up and feel like garbage for the rest of the day—not because you let yourself down, but because you failed your friends. These moments resonate and I'll carry them forward for quite some time.

Sure, it surpasses its predecessors with technical wizardry, but its greatest triumph is an intangible. *Mass Effect 3* is a masterpiece.

▼ Earth is occupied by the Reapers. Destruction is their game.





MULTIPLAYER
Online play adds to your "galactic readiness." Playing a ton of matches is one of the easier ways to see the best ending.

BETTER WITH KINECT \\

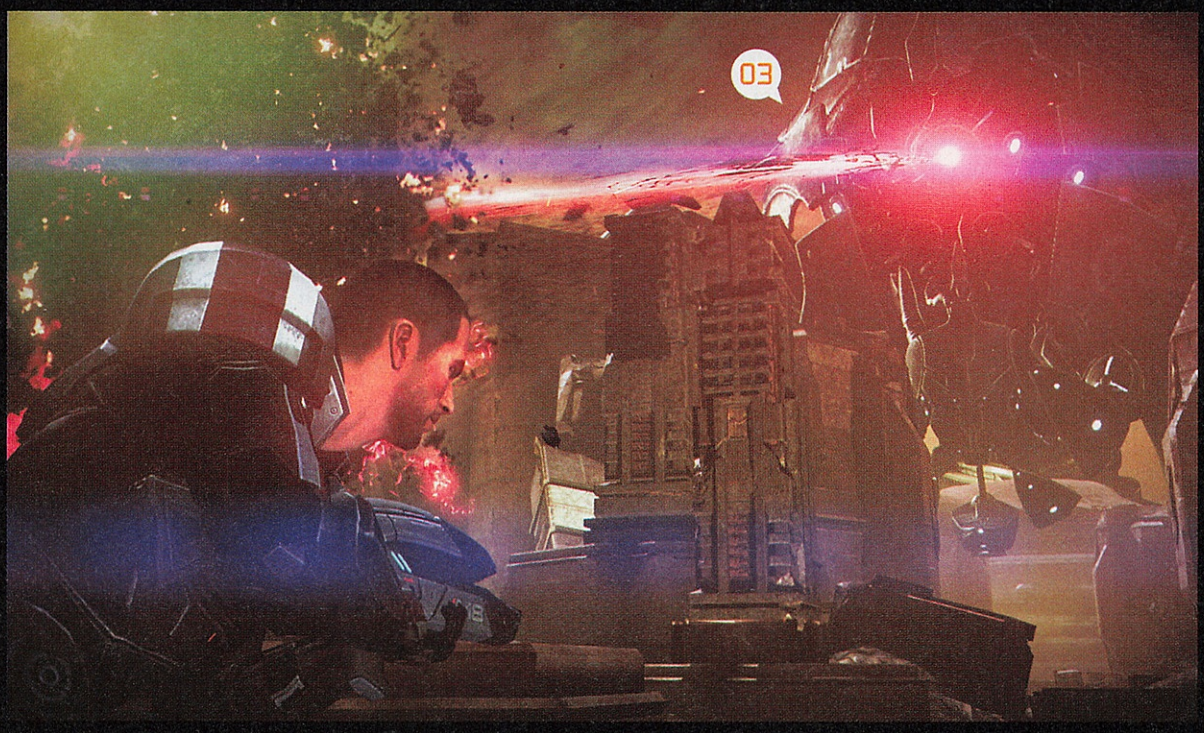
ME3's killer Kinect functionality may have ruined other games for me. After this, I'm going to have a hard time playing another team-based shooter and ordering my squad around using a clunky menu system. With Kinect, issuing an order is as easy as aiming at an enemy or location and telling your crew member to move or attack. Voice commands keep battles fast-paced by eliminating the need to pause and pick out weapons or biotic powers from menus. I even found myself using advanced tactics I hadn't in the previous games because of how easy they were to execute. The passive benefit was that I felt empowered—like I was a commander in the middle of a battlefield. I didn't have to scream at Garrus to flank, but I did anyway. It's easy to get carried away.

THE GENOCIDAL REAPERS—THEY'RE IN THE HOUSE

01

02

A SYMPHONY OF DESTRUCTION \\



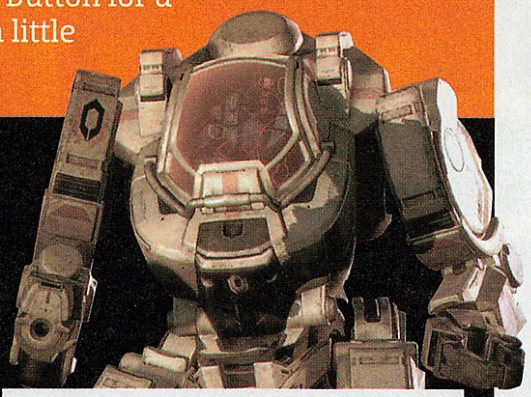
01 LIARA
She's back and stronger than ever. Her singularity biotic attack is vicious.

02 OWNED
There are plenty of ways to boost headshot damage, including equipping armor pieces.

03 REAPER
They're *huge*. They're scary. Defeating one is super satisfying.

I'm Commander Shepard, and this is my favorite soon-to-be-dead guy on the Citadel.

**NEW MOVES ** Shepard has a slew of new moves. In addition to jumping across small gaps, there's an evasive roll to get you out of tight spots during combat and a wicked melee attack with Shepard's omni-tool. Tap the melee button for a quick attack or hold it for one with a little more...ahem, punch.



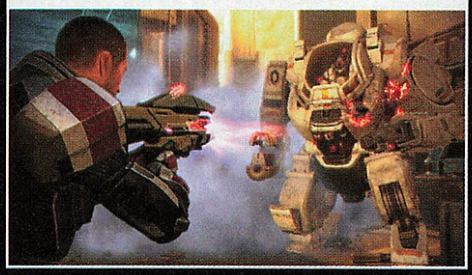
**BROTHERS (AND SISTERS) IN ARMS **

I didn't like many of my new crew members in *ME2*, but this time around BioWare crafted new sidekicks which are believable and genuine, leading to many personal moments with each of the *Normandy*'s inhabitants. They're not confined to conversations in the bowels of the ship, either. As a result, I felt much closer to the characters and saw another side to many of them—not just those I took into battle with me.

ME3 addresses other problems I had with the first two games, too. Scanning planets for resources and side quests is *much* less annoying and time consuming this time around; each mission feels unique; end-of-mission progress reports are gone; and, unlike in *ME2*, every mission feels cohesive and as if it's progressing the story along.

UPGRADED UPGRADES \\

The overhauled upgrade and inventory system is killer. BioWare brought back bolt-on weapon upgrades from *ME1* while streamlining the interface. Finding a better version of a weapon attachment automatically equips it; not having to rummage for the right upgrade to take out a walking tank rocks. Leveling up your skills and powers is a return to form, too—it's a near-perfect blend of the last two games' skill trees.



PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MASS EFFECT 3

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: BioWare
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012

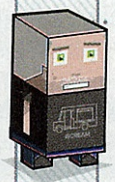
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online

GENRE
Shooter-RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Sci-fi buffs, fans of a killer story

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Final chapter in Shepard's story ties up loose ends
- ❤ Lighter, tighter combat is the best of the series
- ❤ Awesome Kinect voice-command implementation

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Swapping discs on Xbox 360
- ✖ Series newcomers won't have the same attachments to characters as series vets



ANDY SAYS:
ME3 is stunning, and it's sad that the trilogy is over with this release. At least we'll have DLC to extend it a bit.

OVERALL RATING:

5

NINJA GAIDEN 3

Definitive proof that flippin' out just isn't enough sometimes • Words: Alexandra Hall

Ninja make me skittish—they seem to flip out at the slightest provocation. Case in point: Ryu Hayabusa, *Ninja Gaiden 3*'s returning shinobi, seems to do nothing *but* flip out. I have to hand it to him, the way he cuts down foes, zooming all over the place like a whirling thresher, dying bodies flying in his wake, is really quite impressive. This violent display is undeniably spectacular, with the camera always whooshing in to deliver the most dramatic views of the extensive carnage.

Problem is, that's not quite enough to sustain a whole game, and *NG3* is a pared-down, back-to-basics affair that eschews many of the conventions established by its predecessors. Gone are inventories, essence, character upgrades, exploration, secrets, even different main weapons—this Ryu only uses swords. *NG3* offers a streamlined take on the intricate, challenging combat and singularly vicious enemies of the first two games, but when it's stripped of all the supporting elements it feels positively spartan.

NINJA GAIDEN 3 IS A PARED-DOWN, BACK-TO-BASICS AFFAIR

You're left with a series of brawls against legions of similar enemies linked by uninspired traversal sections. Combat's still fast-paced and fluid, but a new reliance on overwhelmingly large mobs (you'll slay about 2,000 enemies in your first play) and constant quick-time events proves more style than substance. By the third of eight stages I was already hankerin' for more variety, which never came. *NG3* is an arcade brawler with spectacular production values. While this format can work in 45-minute arcade games, it can't sustain an 8-to-10-hour quest.

The story, too, is something of a non-starter. It asks great questions about the toll indiscriminate killing would take on a person's soul, but then never comes to much of a conclusion. It's frustrating—that story germ has a lot of potential. Alas, it's not realized here.

NG3 seems to be Team Ninja's attempt to give the ultra-hardcore series more mainstream appeal, but they got a little too enthusiastic with the pruning shears. This leaves *NG3* the summer blockbuster of ninja games: It looks and sounds fantastic, but comes up a little short in substance.

▼ Ryu's bow provides long-range capability. In single-player you don't even have to aim it.

Down but Intact
Dismemberment is a thing of the past. Blood gushes, but body parts remain.

GOT A FRIEND? \\ In contrast to the Clan Battle deathmatch mode, Ninja Trials offer you a chance to tackle some co-op challenges with a friend. There are dozens of trials to attempt, which could add some much-needed longevity to the game. (Sad ninja who don't have friends can also try them solo.)

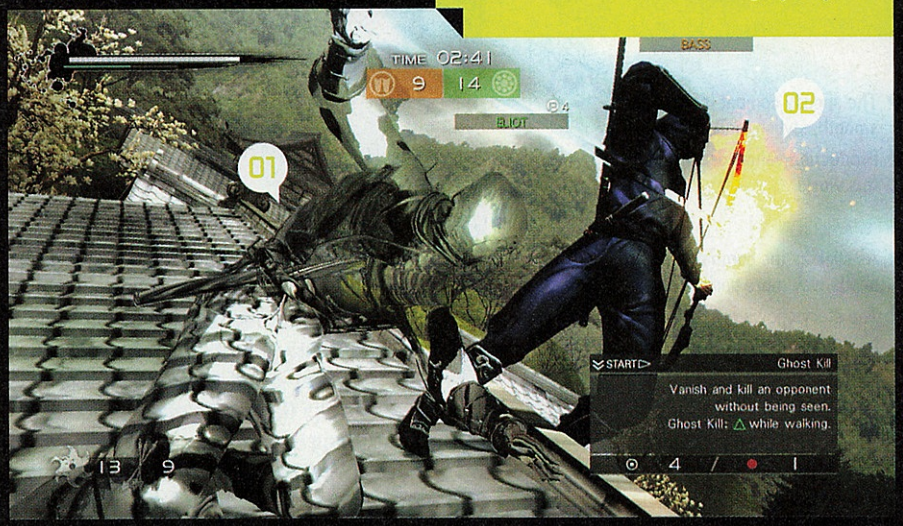
01 SCISSORS
If you walk (tilt the stick slightly) in online mode you'll turn invisible to most other players, letting you go for a stealth kill.

02 ROCK
Players wielding bows can see you just fine, though. You'll feel considerably less stealthy once their flaming arrows light you up.

▼ FROM THE UH-OH DEPARTMENT \\

DON'T FORGET THE ONLINE

This review focuses on *Ninja Gaiden 3*'s single-player offerings, because technical difficulties with the pre-release version prevented us from properly testing its online deathmatch and co-op offerings before press time. We'll bring you our verdict on the online play in Issue 19, and adjust the overall review score if it feels warranted. In the meantime, check out these shots of the online game. Maybe we'll see you online—just look for the black ninja spamming Izuna Drops.



▲ Spruce up your online ninja with various unlockable masks and different-colored gis.

▲ The new glide move lets you deliver death from above—press strong attack when above someone.

PS3 XBOX 360

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

NINJA GAIDEN 3

INFO
Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Team Ninja
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
March 20, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
8-player competitive, 2-player co-op (not yet tested—see note on p.63)

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Long-time series fans (maybe), cutting enthusiasts

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The speedy combat is smooth, stylish, and brutal
- ❤ Production values are out of this world

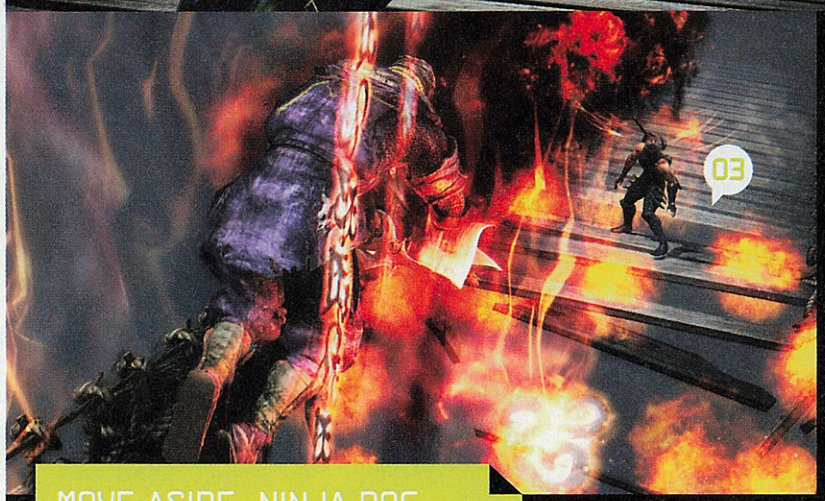
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ As slick as the combat is it needs way more variation
- ✖ The story shows promise but totally fails to deliver

WIL SAYS:
We're really bummed that we weren't able to test the multiplayer as there's not a lot to the single player game. Oh well.

OVERALL RATING:
3

OPM GAMER

NG3 IS THE SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER OF NINJA GAMES



01 ECZEMA?
Yes, that arm is lookin' nasty—it's for story reasons. Eventually Ryu sees a dermatologist.

02 HI AGAIN!
The Black Spider Clan will be a constant thorn in your side, though it's unclear why they're such unrelenting jerks.

03 NO WORRIES
This collapsing bridge is merely another opportunity for Ryu to bust out his new kunai climb.

MOVE ASIDE, NINJA DOG

The original *Ninja Gaiden / Black / Sigma* were notoriously difficult, so then-designer Tomonobu Itagaki added an easier difficulty insultingly named "Ninja Dog." In a feel-good nod to the mainstream, *Ninja Gaiden 3*'s easy difficulty is called "Ninja Hero," and on PS3 it features optional Move support. While it works fine when you're in the mood for a little waggle, you'll get more out of the precise combat system with a traditional gamepad.

▲ Ryu's sword must be made from teflon, considering how easily that blood flicks off post-battle.

▲ Occasionally a helper will accompany you for a stretch. Even ninja agree, friendship is magic.

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM GENERATIONS

Past and present collide in this latest Naruto fighter • Words: David Chapman

For fans of the hit anime and manga series, *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations* is a dream come true. Bursting at the seams with content, *Generations* includes a roster of over 70 fighters, unlockable character customizations, and a Story Mode that covers both the original series and Naruto's later years from the *Naruto: Shippuden* series. One interesting thing here is that Story Mode doesn't just focus on the core plot that fans already know backwards and forwards. *Generations* also includes brand-new content, showing various events play out through the eyes of the supporting cast as well. Studio Pierrot, the studio behind the *Naruto* anime, even provided more than an hour of new content for the game.

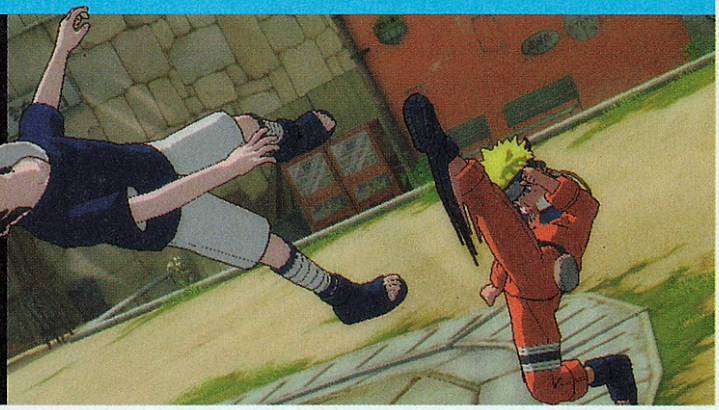
Generations doesn't stray too far from previous games in the series: It's still a frantic button masher at heart. Newcomers expecting deep move sets or intricate strategies will likely come away disappointed. Also, Substitution Jutsu, the game's form of evading attacks, is now limited based an available energy meter, meaning you'll often find yourself defenseless against an opponent's barrage of attacks. On the upside, though, the new Awakening ability (activated when you're close to defeat) boosts your attacks for a short time, allowing the opportunity to pull victory from the jaws of defeat.

Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations is a game built from the ground up for fans. Between exclusive story content, collectibles, and a presentation that looks like it was ripped straight from the anime, there's not much more fans could ask for. However, if you're not already a *Naruto* fan, the actual fighting probably won't charge your chakra enough to last more than a few rounds.

▼ Sasuke still holds a grudge over that kick to the face seen below.

GENERATION GAP:

The *Naruto Shippuden* story picks up two and a half years after the end of the original. By covering both series, *Generations* also allows for some unique head-to-head matchups, such as a young Sasuke taking on his darker future self.



PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM GENERATIONS

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: CyberConnect2
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 13, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online competitive

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Naruto fans who can't get enough of the Nine-Tailed Fox

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Loads of unlockable content
- ❤ Original storylines for supporting cast
- ❤ Great presentation

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Fighting is less strategy and more button mashing
- ✖ If you don't already know about *Naruto*, you'll probably be lost here

WIL SAYS:
The *Naruto* games have a dedicated audience that eats this stuff up—but I can say that group doesn't include me.

OVERALL RATING:

3.5

Babydolls
Team up to man a massive, truck-mounted turret online.
Chopper
Deftly dodge bullets in this nimble new airborne vehicle.

TWISTED METAL

Don't get it twisted: Sweet Tooth and crew are back • Words: Andrew Hayward

Much like the entire car-combat genre it popularized, a new chapter in the *Twisted Metal* series has been on the back burner for some time, last appearing in an original console entry in 2001. It's been a long wait, but the series that launched alongside the PSone is finally back in action on PlayStation 3. As its subtitle-free moniker hints, *Twisted Metal* feels like a back-to-basics release, albeit one tweaked for modern expectations.

Granted, despite various revisions and additions—such as a playable helicopter—the core act of filling rival vehicles full of lead as you whip around large, arena-style stages hasn't changed all that much. *Twisted Metal* introduces a handful of new play types, including chaotic checkpoint races and Juggernaut battles, where you must topple armored semi trucks that spawn enemies. But ultimately, most of the action still centers around being the last vehicle still moving after all the rockets have landed.

Slight as that can feel (especially after all this time), *Twisted Metal*'s brand of vehicular manslaughter is still a lot of fun, and many of the iconic death dealers from the past—including Sweet Tooth in his horrifying ice cream truck, and Axel, the guy with two giant tires attached to his limbs—return with a fresh coat of paint. While brief, the Story Mode delivers the tales of three such drivers using heavily stylized live-action clips, which slickly portray the series's "be careful what you wish for" parables.

But in a game like this, multiplayer is king, whether you're playing online against random foes or trading barbs (and fire) with pals via splitscreen. Though connectivity issues plague the online servers as of this testing, making it tough to jump into many matches—a patch is promised—*Twisted Metal* plays quite well once the action erupts. Seeing 16 players trash a quaint suburban city or ride the rails of a theme-park rollercoaster is a thing of demented beauty, and sure to keep trash-talking fans playing for some time to come.

Twisted Metal is a bit lightweight, both in design and available features, and it's not as polished as hoped, due to some visual glitches and the aforementioned online issues. But past such mostly superficial concerns, taking a four-wheeled killing machine out for a spin can still be a blast, and it's great to see this sleeping giant properly revived once more.

ONLINE ANTICS \\

Up to 16 players can take part in *Twisted Metal*'s seven online match types, which include solo and team versions of Death Match (rack up kills in a time limit), Last Man Standing (be the last driver or team left), and Hunted (everybody against one, or one team against the other's chosen player). Nuke is the last and most unique of the set, in which teams battle it out to access missiles to fire at the other team's gargantuan statue, with the game playing out across innings.

▼ The large open settings can be impressively smashed to bits.

UP IN THE AIR \\

For the first time, drivers can instead be pilots, thanks to Talon, the new helicopter. Controlling it is a little unwieldy, but the skyward advantage is no joke in the heat of battle. Also new: Sweet Tooth can shapeshift into a *Transformers*-esque walking robot, and briefly hover in the air.

▲ Combat-centric races add a new type of action to the standard *Twisted Metal* formula.

▲ Beyond front-mounted chainguns, other firearm options are unlocked via Story Mode.

BACK IN BLACK \\

Twisted Metal comes with a voucher to download 2001's PlayStation 2 smash *Twisted Metal: Black* from the PlayStation Network. While it lacks any sort of high-definition visual bump, the stellar action and grim subject matter still warrant a trip down memory lane. And if you're playing the new PS3 game and thinking, "Man, this really hasn't changed," just look at *Black*'s early last-gen visuals. It's a shock to the system!

PS3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

TWISTED METAL

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Eat Sleep Play
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
February 14, 2012

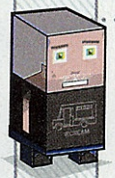
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16-player online, up to 4-player splitscreen, 2-player splitscreen co-op

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Car-combat junkies, online trash-talkers

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Core combat remains exciting, both online and off
- ❤ Well-presented cinematics capture grim tone

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Lightweight gameplay and overall package
- ✖ Online connectivity issues and visual glitches



ANDY SAYS:
Twisted Metal's controls take some time to learn, but once you have them down, the action kicks into high gear!

OVERALL RATING:

3.75

SILENT HILL DOWNPOUR

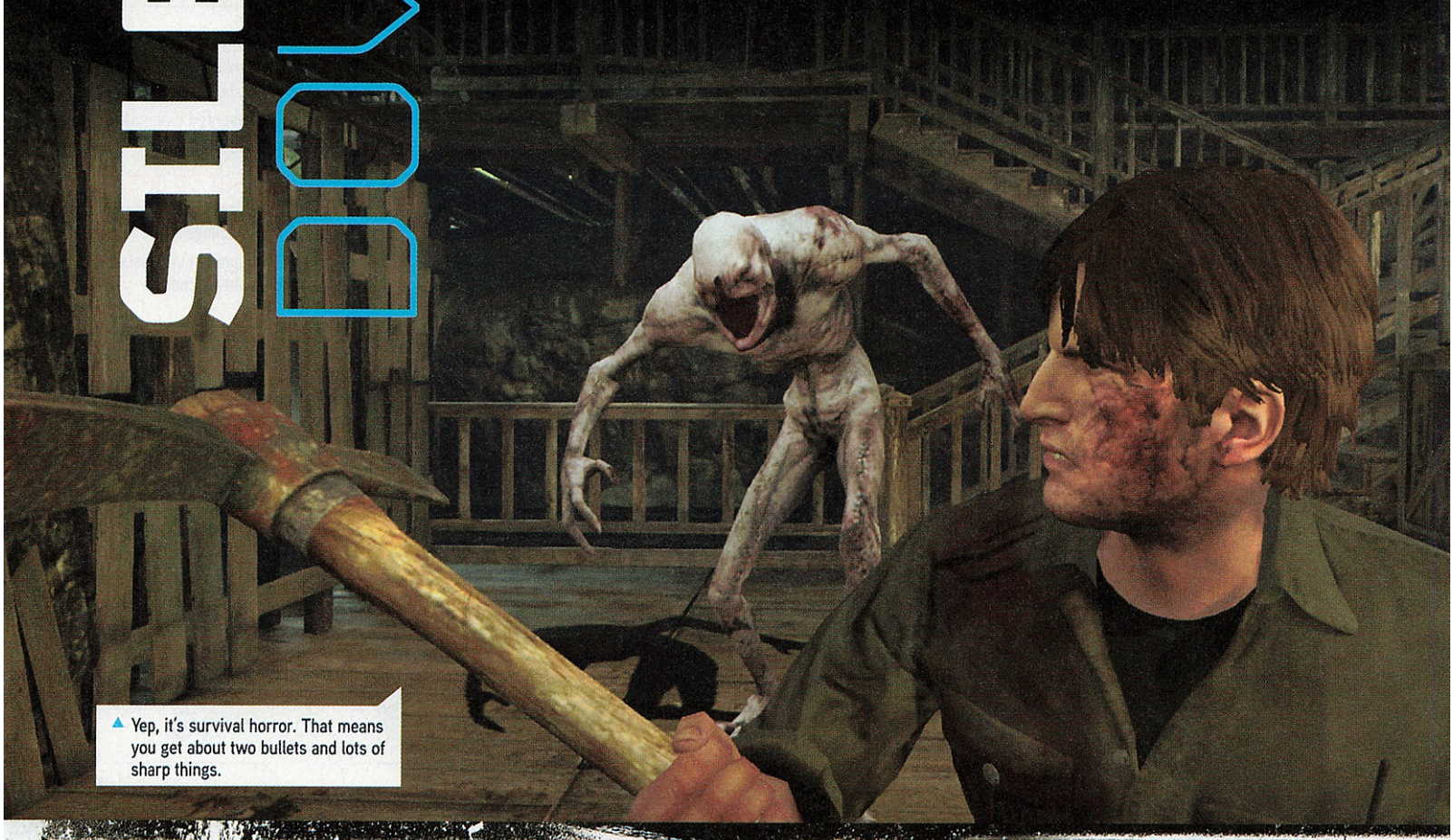
It's raining undead • Words: Ryan Scott

Silent Hill is that other long-running survival horror series—it's always seemed to live in *Resident Evil*'s shadow. Lately, it's no small wonder; these past few years, the Konami-published thriller saga has been passed around like a football to several Western developers, with mixed results. I'm happy to say that *Silent Hill Downpour* is a more interesting game than the ho-hum *Resident Evil 5*, successfully maintaining the sense of dread that Capcom's flagship franchise lost somewhere along the way.

Call it a *Twilight Zone* to *Resident Evil*'s... well, *Resident Evil: The Movie*. *Downpour* starts out eerily enough, setting agreeable-yet-tough convict Murphy Pendleton en route to the titular ghost town after his prison transfer bus crashes and burns. In typical fashion, Silent Hill and its environs are creepy places where creepy things happen. *Downpour* actually takes its time to build up the tension before it starts chucking freakish ghoulies at you, and it never fails to instill "is something behind this door going to eat my face?" fear at every turn. I attribute this largely to the subtle-but-cool mechanic of actually making you push another button to open a door after you've grabbed the handle (but let's not dwell on such nerdy details).

I also attribute it to the frequent darkness and ever-present feelings of claustrophobia and isolation: These may be basic horror hallmarks, but *Downpour* excels at making you feel just helpless enough. It's effective when, say, you're in the surreal *Silent Hill* Otherworld, feverishly outrunning unseen forces as the voices in Murphy's head recall his past crimes. And it's certainly effective when creepy zombie-women pounce on you, and your gun responds with a telltale out-of-ammo "click" that often doubles as "OH GOD OH GOD RUN!"

My one complaint is the frustration inherent to some of the puzzles, which I feel sometimes border on '90s solve-the-soup-cans adventure game conundrums. For a game that otherwise provides a clear sense of direction and forward movement (thanks to Murphy's handy journal and map book), *Downpour* sometimes gets bogged down in these lever-pulling, wheel-turning head-scratchers, causing a lot of that tension to evaporate. It's significant without being a deal-breaker, though that also might be my *Resident Evil* disillusionment talking.

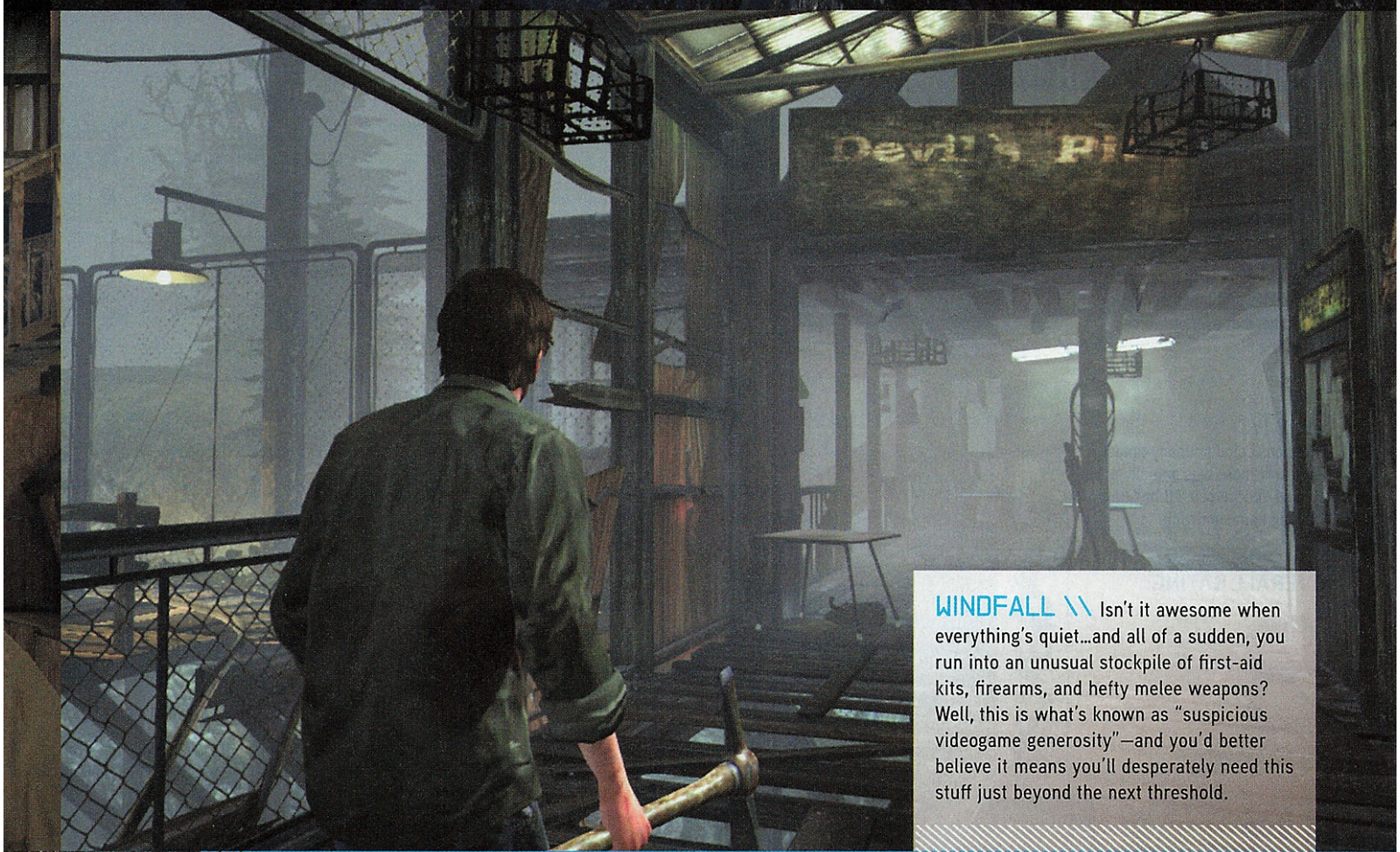


▲ Yep, it's survival horror. That means you get about two bullets and lots of sharp things.

▼ The moment you feel like you might get through this in one piece, this bridge will probably break.

Quick Time!
Get ready for an exciting "press X to not die" section.

**IN THE DARK ** None of these images quite conveys how dark *Downpour* is—and by dark, I literally mean how *devoid of light* much of your journey is. Sure, the obligatory fog and spotty illumination helps...but get used to waving your flashlight around and flicking that lighter, because this is a game that loves to throw terrifying surprises at you amidst pitch-blackness.



**WINDFALL ** Isn't it awesome when everything's quiet...and all of a sudden, you run into an unusual stockpile of first-aid kits, firearms, and hefty melee weapons? Well, this is what's known as "suspicious videogame generosity"—and you'd better believe it means you'll desperately need this stuff just beyond the next threshold.

PS3 XBOX 360

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

SILENT HILL DOWNPOUR

INFO
Publisher: Konami Digital Entertainment
Developer: Vatra Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
March 13, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Survival horror

SUITABLE FOR
Gamers who dream of vacationing in excessively creepy monster towns

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

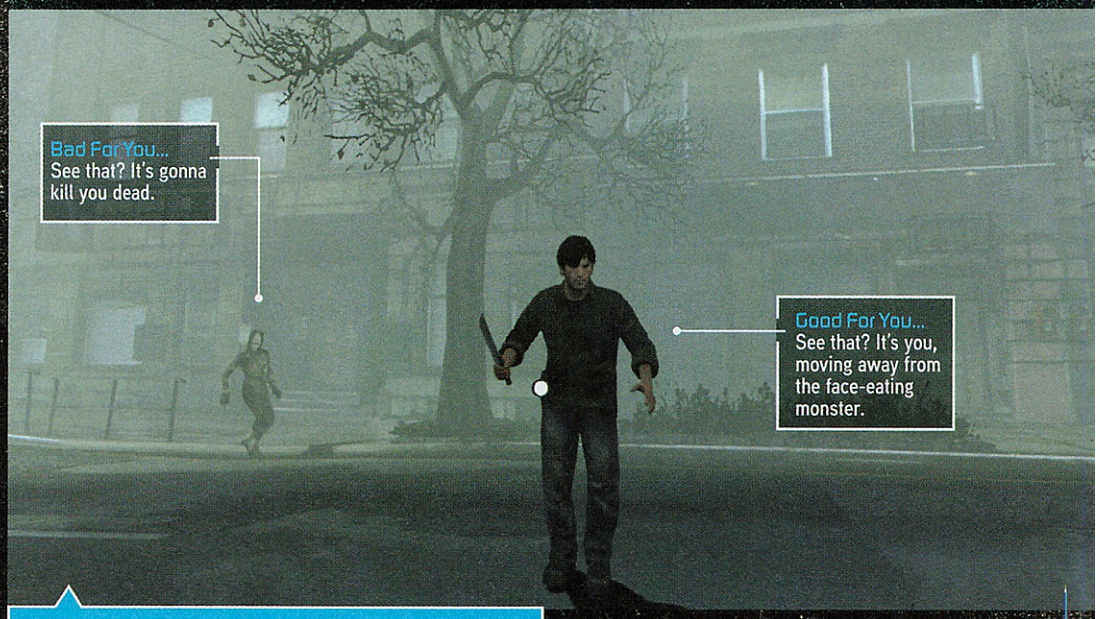
WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Clear, goal-oriented gameplay
- ❤ As scary as a survival horror game ought to be

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ A few extremely frustrating puzzles and timed sequences
- ✖ Somewhat average voice acting

WIL SAYS:
Oh, man...I died so many times! I swear if there was actually a zombie apocalypse, I'd be like a walking ham sandwich.

OVERALL RATING:
3.5

OGamer



DEAFENING SILENCE \\

For those who haven't kept close count, *Downpour* is the eighth game in the main *Silent Hill* series. Konami stopped numbering them after *Silent Hill 4*, but after that came PSP prequel *Silent Hill: Origins*, next-gen debut *Silent Hill: Homecoming*, and the Wii- and PS2-powered *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*. Let's just forget the *Silent Hill* movie ever existed, though.

▲ Sit a spell, fellow wayward soul, and let me provide some obligatory exposition.

▲ Hold onto your flashlight, buddy—something creepy is about to happen.

LIFELINE \\

Silent Hill Downpour doesn't provide much in the way of obvious cues that you're about to die. Without a life meter, you're forced to gauge Murphy's current health level by how badly he groans and limps. A quick first-aid pack is usually enough to get you back on your feet, but such abstract systems also have the added side effect of instilling an incredible sense of paranoia—especially when zombies decide they want piggyback rides.

▲ Marshall Law and his *Tekken* compatriots fit well alongside the *Street Fighter* cast.

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

Contrasting combatants battle it out in one stellar genre mash-up

• Words: Andrew Hayward

Built on the back of the excellent *Street Fighter IV* engine, *Street Fighter X Tekken* is perhaps the most natural crossover fighter to date, effortlessly bringing together its two disparate casts in an entertaining tag-team affair. Picking two fighters from the entire meaty roster—38 fighters in total, with another five guest characters on PlayStation 3—you'll launch fireballs, spinning kicks, and brutal bear-hugs alike in 2D showdowns, tagging in partners as needed and executing remarkable team attacks.

Despite their clean-cut 3D origins, familiar *Tekken* favorites, such as Jin Kazama and Yoshimitsu, look fantastic here, thanks to the aggressively stylized modern *Street Fighter* aesthetic, fitting in well alongside the likes of Chun-Li and Ryu. While not as frenetic or silly as *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* and its ilk, *Street Fighter X Tekken* remains a playful affair, thanks in part to colorful backdrops filled with in-jokes and subtle throwback references to both original franchises.

In addition to online and local co-op play, in which four players can form teams and duke it out, *Street Fighter X Tekken* also introduces a new gem-customization system. Fighters can be outfitted with various gems that award special bonuses, such as increased attack power or defense after meeting certain conditions (such as landing special moves). The gems won't markedly change your skills, but the ability to lightly customize your favorite characters is a nice touch.

Street Fighter X Tekken sadly does not offer much in the way of single-player content, beyond a simple arcade-style ladder and brief challenges to conquer, and similarly cops out on offering fully realized story content for each fighter. But the mash-up proves that two great fighters can play very well with each other, and it's expectedly an excellent multiplayer experience both online and off. We'll just have to see whether Namco Bandai's promised *Tekken X Street Fighter* lives up to Capcom's strong lead.

MORE IN STORE \\

The PS3 version features five extra fighters, including Cole from *Infamous*, Pac-Man, and Mega Man, and the PS Vita release (due later this year) will pack in those plus 12 additional characters pulled from *Street Fighter* and *Tekken*. The dozen extra fighters will also be available in the console versions at some point, unlocked via downloadable content.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012

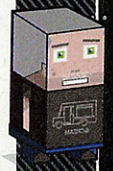
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online or local

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Both casual and die-hard fighting fans

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Strongly executed blend of very different fighting games
- ❤ Lots of available fighters, plus tons of references to others
- ❤ Team-based approach supports four total players

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Lacks enticing single-player content
- ✖ Unremarkable story sequences and cut-scenes

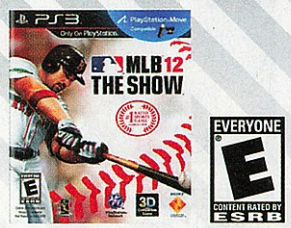


ANDY SAYS:
Capcom is making a killing on these mash-ups—but it's fun to see how dissimilar fighting games are being blended.

OVERALL RATING:

4

PS3 PS VITA



GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

MLB 12 THE SHOW

INFO
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: SCE Studios San Diego
Platforms: PS3, PS Vita
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online and offline

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
Sofa-bound sluggers, armchair GMs, sabermetricians

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Impressively authentic presentation
- ❤ New analog-based batting system
- ❤ Longer, deeper Road to The Show Mode

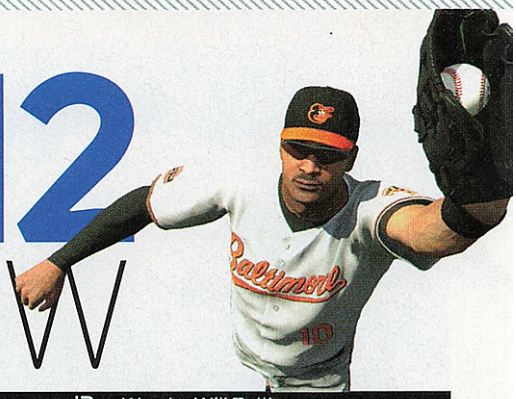
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Pulse Pitching is an annoyance
- ✖ Occasionally feels like MLB 11 with roster updates

WIL SAYS:
MLB 12 The Show is still the definitive baseball sim out there. The only drawback is that Xbox gamers are out of luck.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

MLB 12 THE SHOW



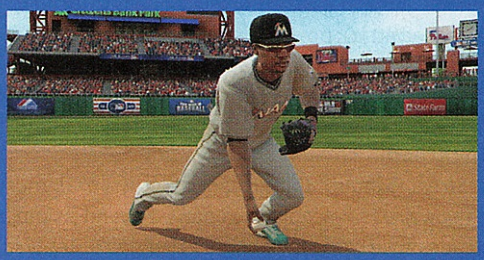
Think you've got what it takes to make it to The Show, meat? • Words: Will Tuttle

Like the general manager of a team that just won the World Series, the developers behind Sony's *MLB* series clearly know better than to mess with a winning formula. Last year's game, *MLB 11 The Show*, was widely lauded not only as the best baseball game of 2011, but as the finest sports game of the year period. It's probably not surprising, then, that *MLB 12 The Show* is largely identical to its predecessor.

At first glance, it looks like most of the changes are relatively minor, including improved ball physics and a greater variety of animations, so that only hardcore fans will notice the difference between the two games. Best of all, the overall presentation is better than ever, to the extent that you might forget you're playing a game and not watching one on TV.

However, spending more time with *MLB 12* reveals a number of notable changes, some of which work better than others. The new Zone Analog Batting builds beautifully off a mechanic introduced in last year's game, allowing you to "aim" a swing with the left analog stick while swinging with the right. It definitely takes a lot of at-bats to master, but it's worth it when you really need a sacrifice fly or want to go opposite field. Unfortunately, Pulse Pitching (which basically amounts to an annoying minigame for each pitch) is ultimately a nuisance that you'll find yourself tiring of after only a few innings.

Still, between the return of the excellent Road to The Show Mode and the introduction of the insanely customizable Diamond Dynasty Mode, there's no denying that *MLB 12 The Show* is the odds-on favorite to bring home the pennant once again.

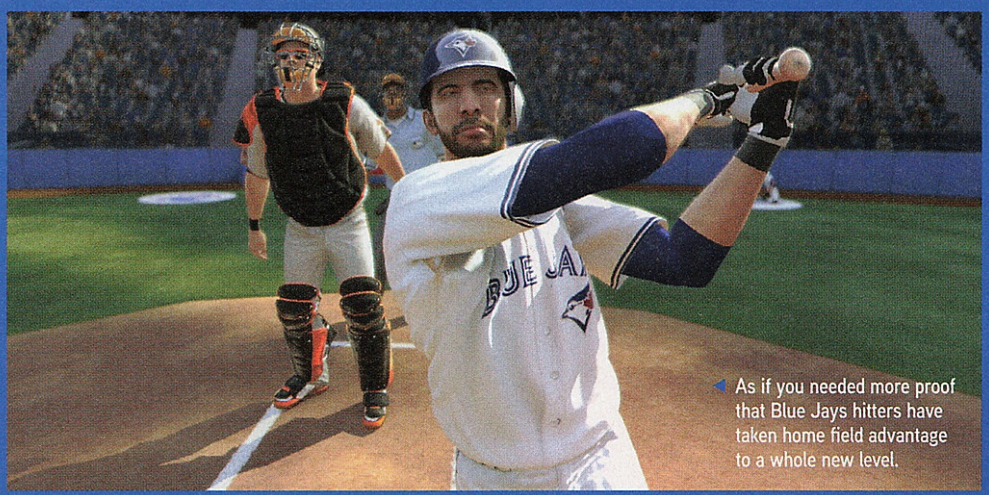


▲ If this screenshot doesn't make you miss the Marlins' teal-and-black uniforms, nothing will.

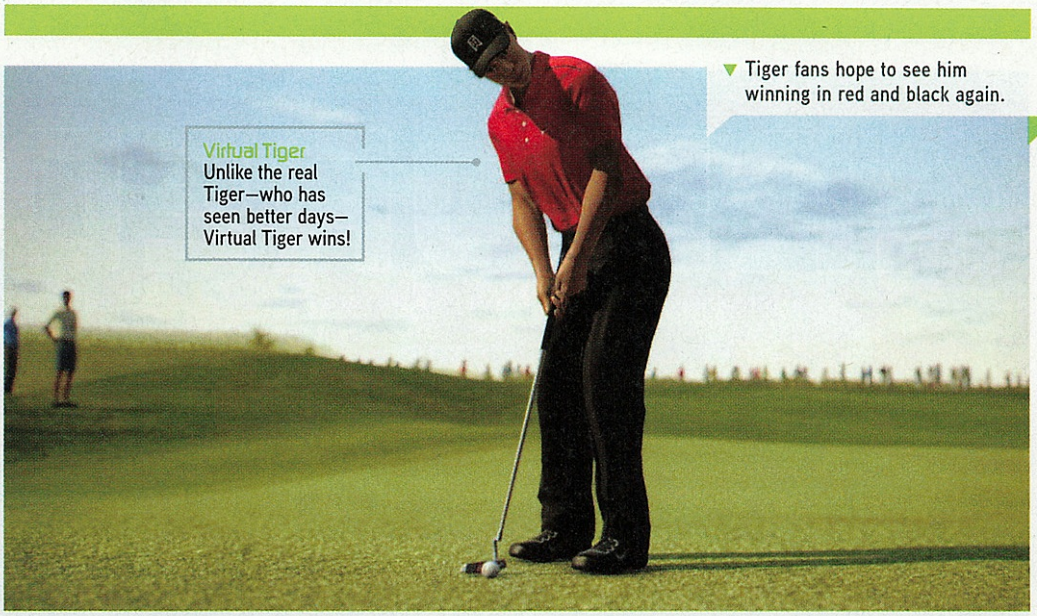
PS VITA REVIEW

MLB 12 The Show represents the PS Vita's potential in myriad ways. Not only does it look and play almost identically to the PS3 version, but it even lets you share save files between the two, allowing you to play entire seasons at home and on the road.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5



◀ As if you needed more proof that Blue Jays hitters have taken home field advantage to a whole new level.



▼ Tiger fans hope to see him winning in red and black again.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 13

With some fun new modes, this year's installment is a fine golf sim • Words: William O'Neal

With all of the trouble that Tiger Woods has been having in his personal and professional lives, it's nice to see that, at least, there's one place where things are still going fairly well for the once number-one golfer and heir apparent to the throne of golf supremacy: the virtual world.

The latest in the long line of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* games, *Tiger 13* builds on last year's game, which centered around the Masters. The developers at EA Tiburon—the Florida studio where the game was made—are smart enough to know that building the game around Tiger's current achievements would make for an extremely short game without much content. However, given Tiger's extensive golf achievements, they had a lot of history to mine for this year's game. To that end, EA Tiburon offers a look back to his roots, and if you're a Tiger fan like me, you're going to love being able to play as Tiger, whether as a 2-year-old in his childhood backyard or as an 8-year-old playing against his father.

Of course, there's more to *Tiger 13* than his history; if you took that part out of the game, there's still an extremely deep gaming experience to be had. Online country clubs enable you to compete against your buddies, and the game boasts 14 championship courses, such as Pebble Beach, Torrey Pines, and TPC Sawgrass. Fans of last year's game will appreciate that the Masters has been brought back—and if Tiger's not your go-to guy, you have over 20 licensed PGA golfers to choose from.

EA also put Kinect motion and voice support in *Tiger 13*. While it works well, the old-school gamer (and bad golfer) in me preferred using a controller. If you want a more physical experience, playing with a Kinect is an option.

If you're a golf fan, then you'll no doubt dig playing *Tiger 13*. It's a fun way to pass the time. And if reliving Tiger's glory years makes you happy, then you'll really love it.

▲ Golfing fans will no doubt love this version of the Tiger Woods experience.

EARLY YEARS \\

Not all players are going to like this mode, but being able to relive Tiger's start in golf was a lot of fun for me. Sure, the mode's gameplay felt really arcadey, and Tiger-as-a-child seemed too cartoonish, but I still got into it. It also offers a comfortable starting point for novices.

▲ Like the real Tiger Woods, you can spend the early parts of the game in friendlier settings learning from his dad.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 13

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Tiburon
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 (Kinect optional)
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 27, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to four players local. Online play in Quick Match and Country Clubs modes.

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
Golf fans and anyone who misses Tiger Woods actually winning tournaments

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The Early Years is a fun way to get into the game
- ❤ Relatively easy to get in and figure out
- ❤ Kinect support

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Some game modes may feel too arcadey for some
- ✖ Can sometimes be as infuriating as real golf

ANDY SAYS:
I may not wake up on Sunday excited to watch the final round of the PGA on TV, but I'll play *Tiger 13* for hours on end.

OVERALL RATING:

4

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ARMORED CORE V

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: From Software
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 20, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 10-player online, clan support

GENRE
Action/simulation

SUITABLE FOR
Robot jockeys who play well with others

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Lots of customization options
- ❤ Robust online play that rewards teamwork and strategy

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The story is a bit lacking
- ✖ Steep learning curve for newcomers

WIL SAYS:
Armored Core V has a lot under the hood. You could keep yourself busy all day making customized mechs. Um...I did!

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

@@@@@

ARMORED CORE V

I like big mechs and I cannot lie...baby's got bot! • Words: David Chapman

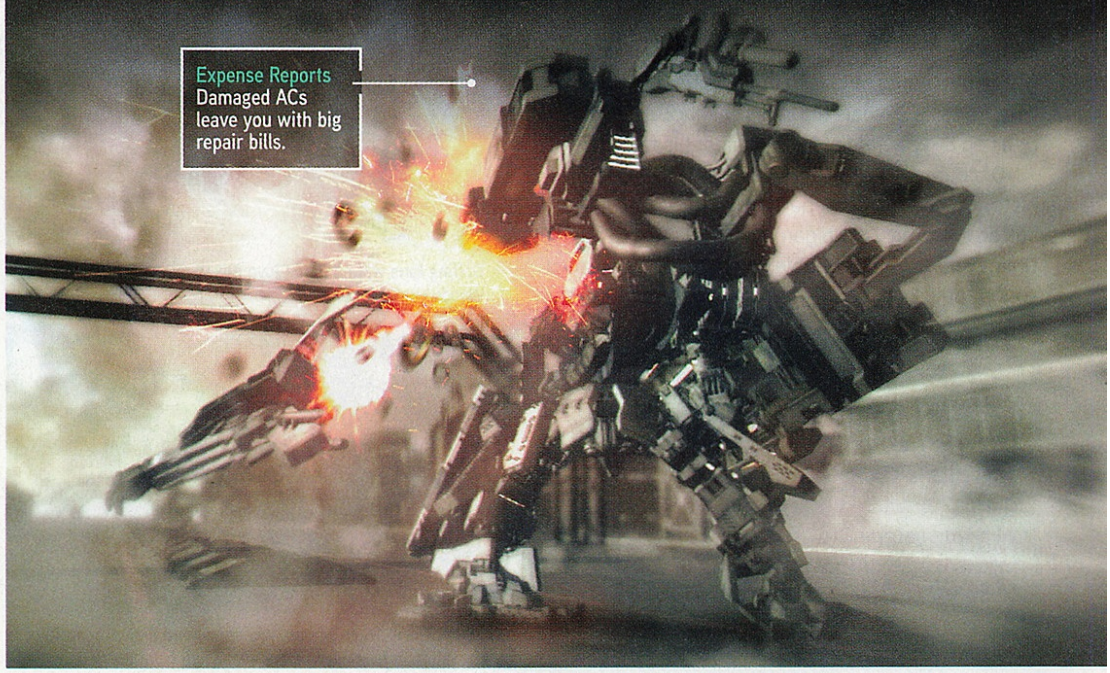
There's just something about getting behind the controls of Robby the Robot and a Sherman tank's love child that's inherently cool...when it's done right. Which leads us to *Armored Core V*, the latest in From Software's popular mech-vs-mech series. Is *Armored Core V* the well-oiled machine that fans have been waiting for? Or is it finally time to send these Rock'em Sock'em Robots to the scrapheap?

Online play is one of *Armored Core V*'s key components. The whole game takes place in a persistent online world, and after creating your profile and pushing through the obligatory tutorial missions, you're immediately prompted to join an existing online faction or to create your own. From that point on, every mission you undertake earns points for your team as you carve out your piece of the map.

It wouldn't be an *Armored Core* game without fully customizable mechs, and *Armored Core V* features more than 500 different parts that you can use to create your own unique mechanized warriors. If you're new to the franchise, it can feel a bit overwhelming, but before long you'll be tweaking out your mech as if it was your own personal hot rod.

If you haven't played an *Armored Core* game before, be prepared for a bit of a learning curve. There are a lot of intricacies in nimbly operating one of these multi-ton mammoths, but the payoff for sticking with it is well worth it. *Armored Core V* is simply one of the coolest mech experiences you can find, short of living in a big-budget sci-fi flick.

▼ Scanned wreckage can be salvaged for parts in some missions.



ASURA'S WRATH

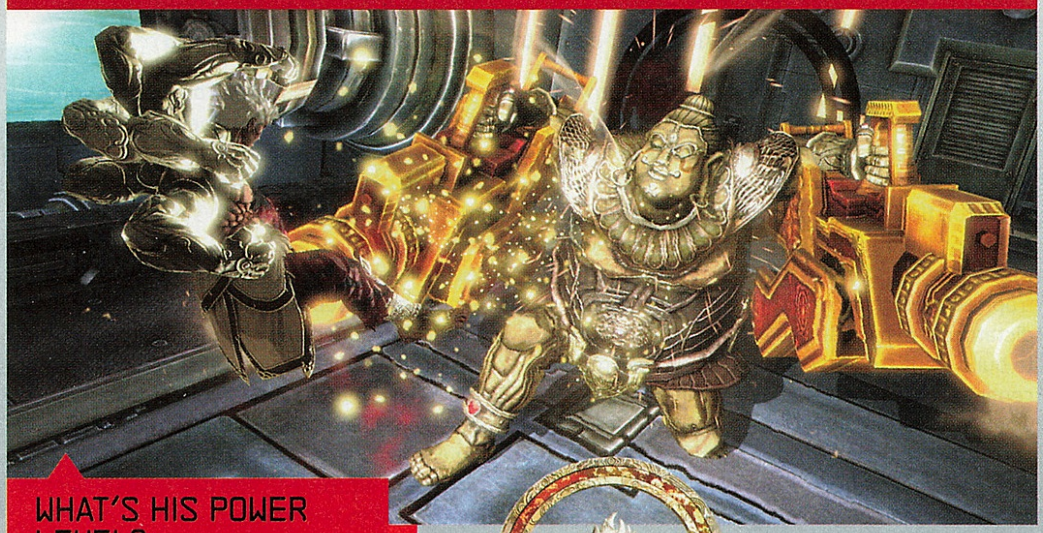
You might like him when he's angry • Words: Heidi Kemps

Asura's Wrath starts off with a bang, setting up a story of an epic war for Earth very loosely based on Buddhist myths, sending super-powered hero Asura flying through space to destroy a demonic creature roughly a quarter of the size of the planet. And that's *before* the other generals fighting the war against the demonic Gohma betray him, kidnap his daughter, kill his wife, and really get his blood boiling.

It takes a little while for *Asura's Wrath* to really get rolling—the first hour or so is mostly on-rails with a few quicktime events (QTE). But once it does ramp up, the game becomes completely, delightfully nuts. Combat is fast and easy to control, and it's immensely satisfying to crush enemies with powerful combos, rushing strikes, and intense, anger-fueled special attacks. When Asura's rage is at its peak, you can unleash crazy attacks that set the next string of story events in motion.

The game's sheer scale is exhilarating, and seeing the level of combat craziness escalate constantly is a thrill. Sadly, the presentation doesn't mask how shallow the game is at its core: Combat quickly becomes a simple mess of combos and QTEs in between lengthy (but beautifully rendered) cut-scenes. It feels less like a full game and more like a short anime series with fighting scenes and controller prompts scattered throughout in an attempt to keep you engaged. *Asura's Wrath* certainly doesn't fail at being entertaining, but it's simply too brief and lacking in depth to be a true sleeper hit.

▲ What you see here is one of the quieter action sequences in *Asura's Wrath*.



WHAT'S HIS POWER LEVEL?

Asura's Wrath owes a great deal of its inspiration to anime. The presentation mimics a Japanese TV program: The game's divided into "episodes," complete with "stills" to mark where commercial breaks would go. The constant one-upping of increasingly crazy superpowers over the course of the story is also a well-loved anime trope. On a scale of 1 to 10, Asura's anime influence is *over nine thousand!*

◀ This big fella is Asura's old teacher. He's also one of many characters you will crush like an insect with your awesome might.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ASURA'S WRATH

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: CyberConnect2
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 28, 2012

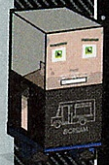
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Players who want to destroy literally planet-sized rivals

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Insane boss fights
- ❤ Unprecedented scale of combat
- ❤ Beautiful visuals and entertaining cut-scenes

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Brief length
- ✖ Lack of depth to combat
- ✖ Feeling like you'd rather just watch



ANDY SAYS:
It's sad that the game is not very long, but the action you get in that time is crazy and fun. You'll feel larger than life!

OVERALL RATING:

3.25

PC

MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

JAGGED ALLIANCE: BACK IN ACTION

INFO
Publisher: Kalypso Media
Developer: Bit Composer Games, Coreplay
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
February 14, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Strategy

SUITABLE FOR
Strategy gamers in search of a challenge

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

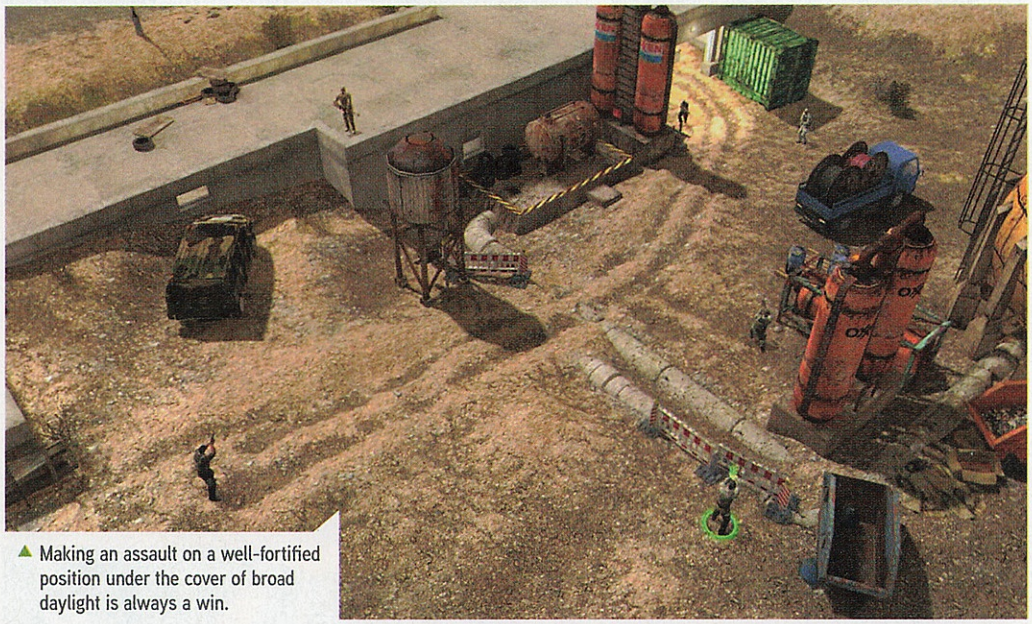
WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Deep micromanagement
- ❤ Large, detailed maps
- ❤ Many challenging missions

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Strays from the franchise's turn-based roots
- ✖ An unforgiving and often unmanageable combat
- ✖ Game AI is often dumb

WIL SAYS:
In the '90s, I had some co-workers were into *Jagged Alliance* when it came out. This would surely disappoint them.

OVERALL RATING:

3



▲ Making an assault on a well-fortified position under the cover of broad daylight is always a win.

JAGGED ALLIANCE: BACK IN ACTION

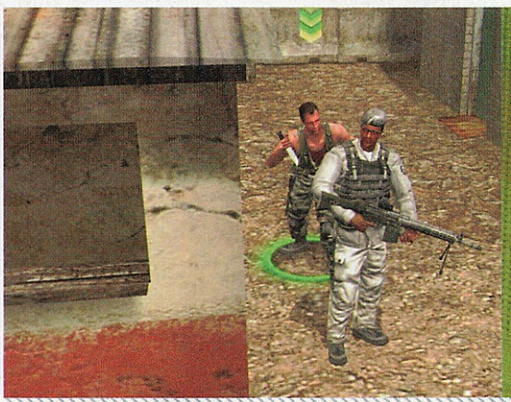
Gear up, fight the good fight, and collect a nice paycheck • Words: Seamus Ballamy

A modern-day remake of the 1999 turn-based tactical combat classic *Jagged Alliance 2*, *Jagged Alliance: Back in Action* has a lot of things in common with its 13 year-old ancestor. Both games put you in command of a ragtag group of professional mercenaries hired by a mysterious benefactor to free a fictional tropical country from the grip of a merciless dictator. Both provide you with the opportunity to build a private army of comically voiced mercenaries, each with respective strengths and weaknesses. Military hardware? Firepower? You bet: Both titles afford a massive arsenal of protective gear and weapons with which you can outfit your mercenaries.

Unfortunately, there's one trait that this fancy 3D update doesn't share: being a lot of fun.

From start to finish, *JA:BiA* browbeats you with unforgiving real-time (albeit pauseable) squad-based combat, made all the more complicated and painful by the game's lackluster AI and underpowered unit overwatch system. Even by old-school gaming standards, this is one tough title that'll test the mettle—and sanity—of even the most seasoned veteran. That said, *JA: BIA* isn't all doom and gloom. In bringing the franchise into the 21st century, Kalypso did manage to maintain the title's robust micromanagement options, providing you with the same abilities to deal with your mercenary army's finances, procure new equipment, and hire new soldiers to take the fight to the enemy.

In short, this game is an accountant's dream and an armchair general's worst nightmare.



JAGGED HISTORY LESSON

If you're serious about strategy gaming or tactical roleplaying games, there's no excuse for not familiarizing yourself with the whole series of *Jagged Alliance* games. Released for MS-DOS in 1994, the original game was followed by a number of sequels and expansion packs, including *Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games*, *Jagged Alliance 2*, and a poorly received Nintendo DS version of the original *Jagged Alliance* in 2009.

BINARY DOMAIN

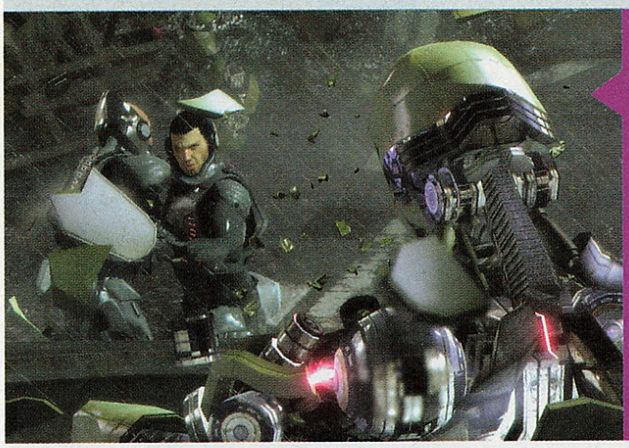
What does it mean to be a gun-toting, profanity-spewing robot? • Words: David Wolinsky

Who can you trust?" is the big question at *Binary Domain*'s bullet-blasting center, though there are more than enough explosions, robots, and weapon upgrades to distract you from pondering this deeply. It's 2080 and you're The Survivor, a super-soldier commanding a rotating squad of action-movie stereotypes (the snotty Brit, the obnoxious American, etc.) who has been sent in to dethrone a Tokyo master criminal who's manufacturing bots with fleshy skins and implanted memories, à la *Blade Runner*.

Your leadership and how you perform in combat can alienate your comrades or make them selfless blitzers who will sacrifice themselves to revive your fading corpse. You can interact with them via the headset, though this is flimsy at best. When it works, it's cathartic to scream "fire!" and have your minions carry out their orders. Other times, simply breathing will issue commands or, astonishingly, cuss words too foul to print here—which the game still recognized and ignored. (Though sometimes they elicit goofy responses like, "After this battle!" making it unclear whether *Binary Domain* knows what you're saying.) Kinect even picks up in-game sounds, which is further frustrating.

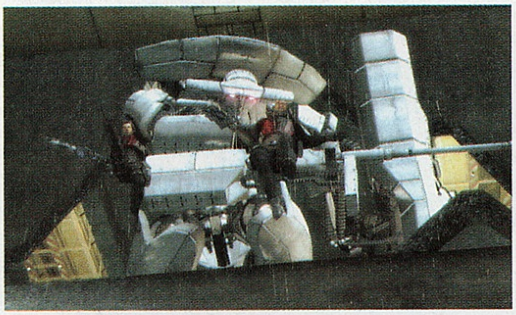
Nevertheless, the meat of *Binary Domain*—the cover-based shooting you do with your squad—lasts just long enough to keep it from getting too boring. The more robots you scrap, the more you get to upgrade you and your mates. That said, the best moments come via *Uncharted*-like sequences where you hop on a jet ski to avoid gunfire or lure a giant gorilla robot into blast charges, then shoot its robo-ape brain to smithereens. There are a lot of familiar notes playing in *Binary Domain*, but they're rearranged in just a way to warrant that you hum through the whole tune at least once.

Y-M-C-AIIEE! He must've heard that the Village People were going to add a ninja...



DON'T TRUST THE MACHINES

Despite the interesting gimmicks in *Binary Domain*'s offline campaign, online there's not as much ingenuity on display. Invasion is the best, but it is just *Gears of War*'s Horde mode on smaller sections of maps already in the main game. The other modes are fine, but a trifle—as if hopping online to play against friends is an afterthought.

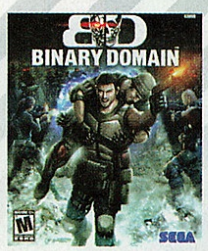


▲ They're hoping to stay alive long enough for this metal monster to rust in the rain—and that it's not aluminum.

▲ "Folks, there'll be a slight delay today—we have to wait for the gunfight to end and the train to be extinguished."

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BINARY DOMAIN

INFO
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Yakuza Studio
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 28, 2012

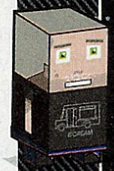
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Blade Runner fans who want something a little less mentally stimulating

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ When the voice commands work, it's sublime
- ❤ Characters are occasionally pretty funny
- ❤ Upgrade system keeps things interesting

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Very repetitive
- ✖ Multiplayer modes are wafer-thin on longevity
- ✖ Main campaign is awful short



ANDY SAYS:
What's up with this trend we're seeing lately of short gameplay times? Okay, not every game will be *Skyrim*, but still...

OVERALL RATING:

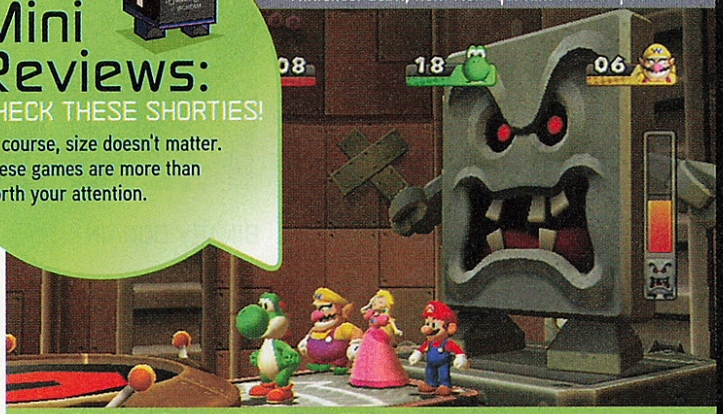
3.5

Mini Reviews:

CHECK THESE SHORTIES!

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

▼ Nihiciissi debit, nem Nem qui ium liatibus pudic.



▼ Mt ditiae labo. Solut omnieni quam, officiam, temquaspelis

MARIO PARTY 9

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: NDCUBE • Platforms: Wii • Words: Chuck Osborn

Games like *Mario Party 9* are nearly review-proof. First, it's got "Mario" in the name, and second, fans know pretty much what to expect from the ninth iteration of anything.

This latest Wii extravaganza doesn't shake up the series, but does add a few twists to make it worth buying. Featuring 80 new minigames, *Mario Party 9* lets you and up to three of your friends take turns piloting a car through board-game-like stages, competing to collect the most Mini Stars stolen by Bowser and his crew. Each stage ends with a boss battle in which players must cooperate while still competing for stars.

Overall, this game is a winner for families. The solo campaign isn't as much fun since you'll be waiting for AI players to take their turns, but the minigames and surprise events are imaginative. Sudden (and unfairly random) reversals of fortune in star collecting are the norm, though, so don't say we didn't warn you.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4 players
GENRE Party
RELEASE DATE
March 11, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Families, lovers of traditional board games

OVERALL RATING: 4

CAPCOM DIGITAL COLLECTION

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Backbone/Various • Platforms: Xbox 360 • Words: Alexandra Hall

Eight Xbox Live Arcade games on a disc sounds like a fine idea, but the reality falls short due to uneven quality. *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2* is super cool, *Final Fight: Double Impact* offers two solid arcade ports, and *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* and *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* are worthy curiosities. The quirky animal-herding game *Flock!* is amusing, but not terribly compelling. Finally, *1942: Joint Strike*, *Commando 3*, and especially *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil* are janky shooters, each disappointing in their own special ways.

CDC costs $40, but you probably don't want $40 worth of these games. Just buy the few you want the old-fashioned way (wait, downloading is old-fashioned?) while avoiding the dross.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Various
GENRE Action/puzzle
RELEASE DATE
March 27, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Post-apocalyptic survivors who miss Xbox Live

OVERALL RATING: 3

▼ *SSF2T* is still the bomb, but it's hard to find online opponents.

▼ The best and worst: *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2* (left) and *Rocketmen*.

UNIT 13

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: Zipper Interactive • Platforms: PS Vita • Words: David Chapman

Unit 13, the latest from SOCOM developer Zipper Interactive, forgoes any real story in favor of straight-up military action. Choosing from 36 available missions, you push for higher scores and extra XP to unlock new missions and upgrade the game's six customizable classes. Daily Challenges are updated online to give a steady stream of new content, and you can call for backup with two-player co-op.

Unit 13 looks great, and the controls are surprisingly intuitive. The dual analog sticks combined with a relatively intuitive use of the Vita touch screen keep the action flowing. It's not perfect, though. More than once my soldier leapt over cover accidentally and was quickly taken down by enemy fire.

Let's face it...shooters, by and large, have been firing blanks when it comes to handheld consoles. *Unit 13* bucks this trend by hitting the Vita with guns blazing and armed to the teeth with features.

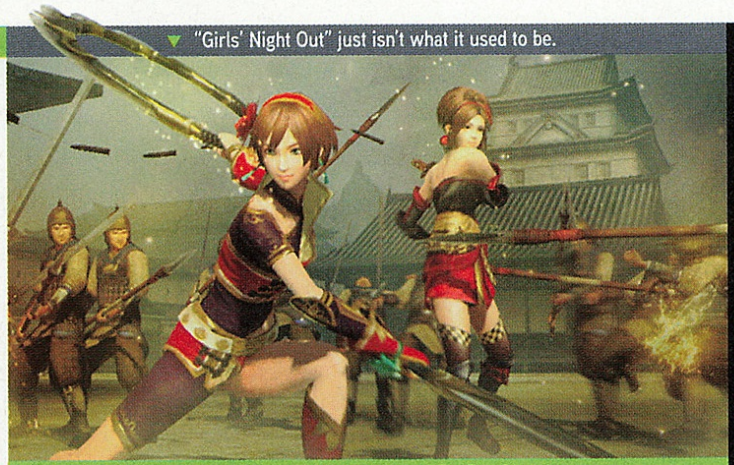
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online co-op
GENRE Third-person shooter
RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Shooter vets wanting their next tour of duty on the road

OVERALL RATING:
4

▼ Backup is never more than a Wi-Fi hotspot away.

▼ Custom loadouts enable you to pick the right gun for the right job.

▼ "Girls' Night Out" just isn't what it used to be.



▼ "Don't mind me. Just waiting for *Ninja Gaiden 3*." – Ryu Hayabusa

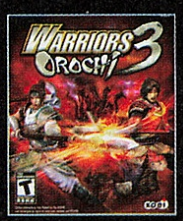
WARRIORS OROCHI 3

Publisher: Tecmo Koei • Developer: Tecmo Koei/Omega Force • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 • Words: David Chapman

It's been five years since the minds behind *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* decided the two great tastes might taste great together, giving birth to the *Warriors Orochi* series. For this third chapter of the popular hack-n-slash crossover, it's all about fan service.

Warriors Orochi 3 guest stars a host of other Tecmo Koei characters. Some, like *Ninja Gaiden*'s Ryu Hayabusa and *Dead or Alive*'s Ayane, fit nicely into the environment, but others—such as The Maid of Orleans, Jeanne d'Arc or the Greek mythological hero Achilles—feel completely out of place among these feudal warriors.

New twists try to inject some freshness. Characters can bond together and open up new moves, new stages, and even new story branches. Despite this, *WO3* ultimately follows the same old button-mashing, kill-'em-all action that, for good or bad, has remained mostly unchanged since the first *Dynasty Warriors* 15 years ago.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op offline/online
GENRE Action
RELEASE DATE
March 20, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Hack-n-slashers who haven't had their fill of sword swingin'

OVERALL RATING:
3.25

Silly mini-games are a crucial ingredient in *PokéPark 2*.

Candy aside, there's big trouble brewing in this funpark.

POKÉPARK 2: WONDERS BEYOND

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Creatures • Platforms: Wii •
Words: Nathan Meunier

Syrupy-sweet cuteness abounds in Pikachu's latest adorable adventure. This spinoff sequel has all of the charm the core franchise is known for, but it lacks substance. Sleuthing around for Pokémon who've been kidnapped, fed psychedelic cake, and imprisoned in a magical wonderland leads Pikachu and pals on a meandering journey full of half-hearted detours that struggle to hold your attention.

A strong kid-friendly emphasis on forging new friendships, rather than capturing your comrades, makes for lighthearted battles, races, mini-games, and fetch quests. While entertaining, the simple tasks quickly grow repetitive. The vibrant world may be full of activities and cute critters, but only the youngest players will have the patience to push through *PokéPark 2*'s slow pace and shallow depth.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local
GENRE Action-adventure
RELEASE DATE
February 27, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Younger Pokémon enthusiasts

OVERALL RATING:
3

RHYTHM HEAVEN FEVER

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo, TNX • Platforms: Wii •
Words: Matt Cabral

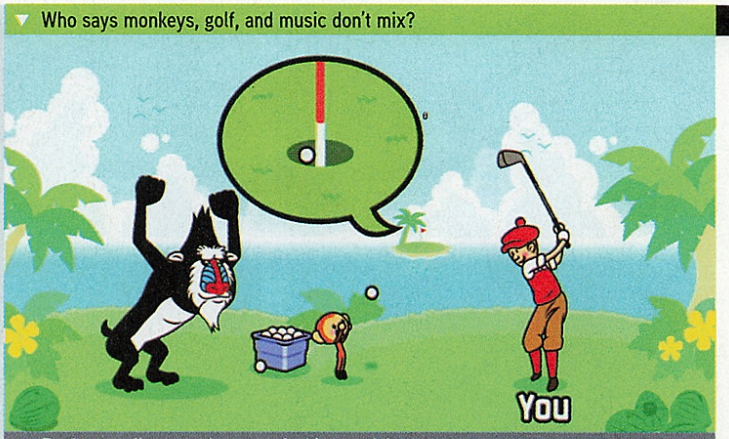
Don't let *Rhythm Heaven Fever*'s colorful characters, cute presentation, and infectious tunes fool you. While it may look like another throwaway mini-game collection, it's one of the most challenging music games since we were wielding plastic guitars.

The seemingly simple concept sees you pressing controller buttons in time to the music—and completing beyond-bizarre tasks. While the early games ease you into the toe-tapping action, increasingly complex combinations and higher precision up the difficulty as you progress. Like *WarioWare* set to music, *RHF*'s 50-plus mini-games are equal parts addictive, challenging, and charming. And it's better with a co-op buddy. Its quirkiness isn't for everyone, but those craving a fresh fix will want to get into *RHF*'s groove.

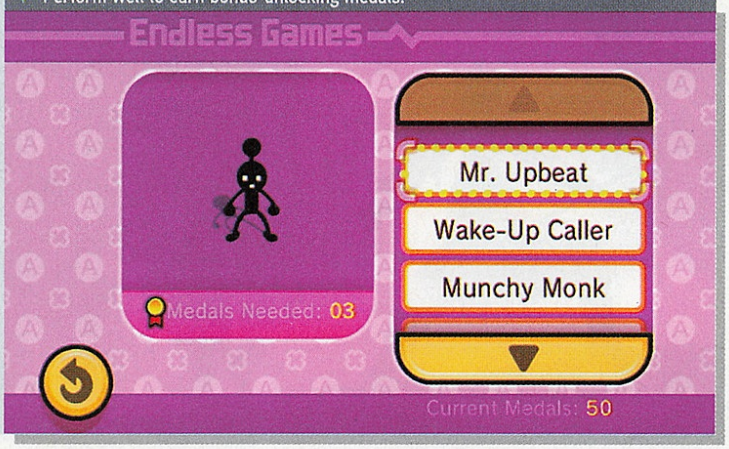
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local co-op
GENRE Music
RELEASE DATE
February 13, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Music gamers tired of strumming plastic axes

OVERALL RATING:
4.5

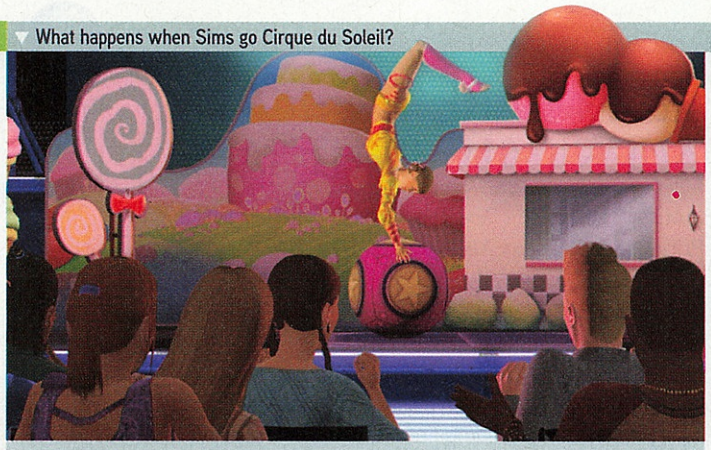
Who says monkeys, golf, and music don't mix?



Perform well to earn bonus-unlocking medals.



▼ What happens when Sims go Cirque du Soleil?



THE SIMS 3 SHOWTIME

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: The Sims Studio
Platforms: PC • Words: David Chapman

Sims steal the show in this latest expansion to *The Sims 3*, learning new stage performer careers as things like magicians, acrobats, and singers. *Showtime* attempts to add more social elements to *Sims 3*, such as the new SimPort feature, which enables you to perform in friends' worlds. Unfortunately, other than sending your Sim for a visit, you can't really interact with those friends. While the new social elements still feel a bit anemic, *Showtime* packs a lot of content for fans who need more to do in their virtual lives.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

▼ It's far from fully-featured, but the boxing mode's "play chicken" mechanic works.

MARIO & SONIC AT THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

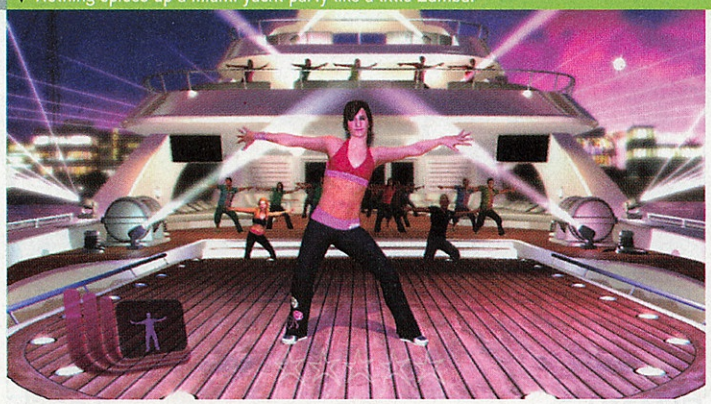
Publisher: Sega • Developer: Sega Sports Japan
Platforms: Wii, 3DS • Words: Dave Rudden

Want more mascot-based, motion-controlled sports? A warning—the modern-day track-and-field formula adds swipes, flicks, and yells to the button-spamming of years past, but there's not much evolution from '08.

Still have the urge to celebrate the Summer Games? Go with the 3DS version—its dedicated Story Mode is better than the Wii's chaotic London Party. If you're strictly in the mood for multiplayer, though, both can offer up mindless minigame fun in spurts shorter than the opening ceremonies.

OVERALL RATINGS: 3.25 (3DS); 2.75 (Wii)

▼ Nothing spices up a Miami yacht party like a little Zumba.



ZUMBA FITNESS RUSH

Publisher: Majesco • Developer: Zoe Mode
Platforms: Xbox 360 (Kinect required) • Words: Neilie Johnson

Be warned, anti-fitness-trenders: *Zumba Fitness Rush* is so entertaining, after 10 minutes playing it, you, too, will be bona fied Zumba-ers. Despite occasionally unresponsive voice commands, it improves exponentially from the first *Zumba Fitness*, and its catchy, exciting routines make exercise—and burning calories—so much fun. Zumba with a friend in local co-op mode or use the Zumba World function to search for real-world venues where you can show off your Zumba-master moves.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

▼ I wish I looked this cool while falling backwards.

NEVERDEAD

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Rebellion
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Near *NeverDead*'s outset, I realized some things are worse than death. Unlike the protagonist, its charm isn't immortal. The game worked when I sliced gaggles of enemies with manic sword slashes, not during repetitive boss battles or often-dull platforming.

It didn't respect me as a player with its 10-hour grind through same-y enemies and clichéd narrative. Insane difficulty spikes and demented repetition beat into me that it didn't care if I played or not.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

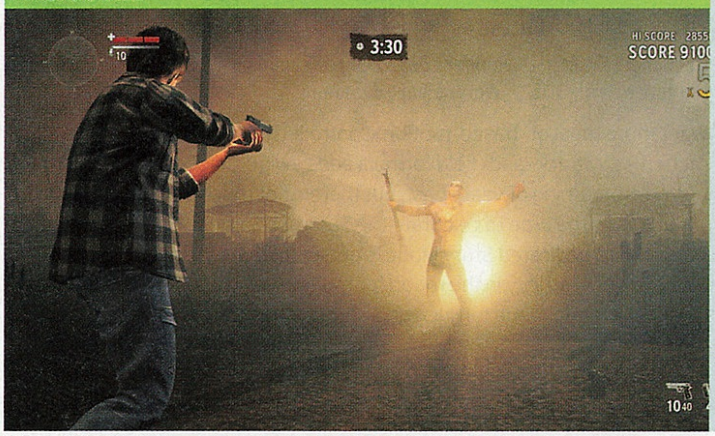
Words: Ryan Scott

DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? *@GAMER*'s dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons to consider for your console and PC.

Learn to dodge, or you're a dead man.

Rise and shine.



ALAN WAKE'S AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

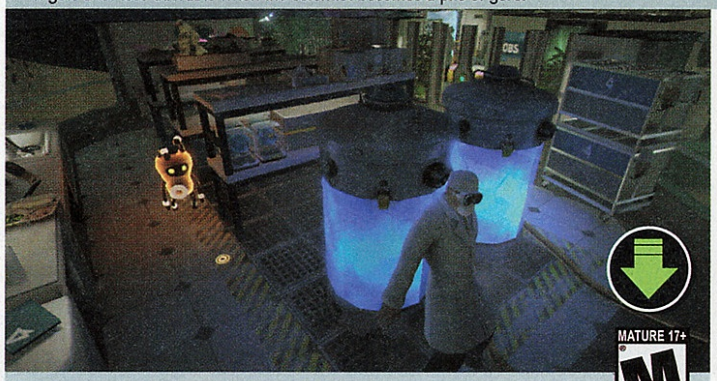
Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Remedy Entertainment • Price: $15 • Platforms: XBLA (February 22, 2012)

Less an *Alan Wake* sequel and more a side story, *Alan Wake's American Nightmare* tells another excessively creepy story about a cantankerous novelist whose horrific creations have come to life. As the game opens, Wake finds himself inside an episode of Night Falls—an in-universe *Twilight Zone* takeoff, complete with Rod Serling "expy"—in pursuit of the doppelganger that was responsible for much of the first game's conflict. *American Nightmare* preserves the series's light-versus-darkness dichotomy, once again forcing Wake to use a flashlight-and-firearms combo to stun and slay his ethereal demons.

It's plain to see why developer Remedy hasn't positioned this as a proper sequel. Mechanics-wise, *American Nightmare* essentially acts as a standalone expansion—and if you're a fan of Alan Wake's bizarre life story...well, here's another layer of it. As in the first game, scattered manuscript pages help to decipher just what's going on (and double as currency for purchasing firepower), and environmental puzzles help to break up the sometimes overly tough combat scenarios as you skulk about in the night. *Alan Wake* was one of the most atmospheric and interesting thriller games, and *American Nightmare* aptly maintains that.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

It gets a lot less adorable when the scientist becomes a pile of gore.



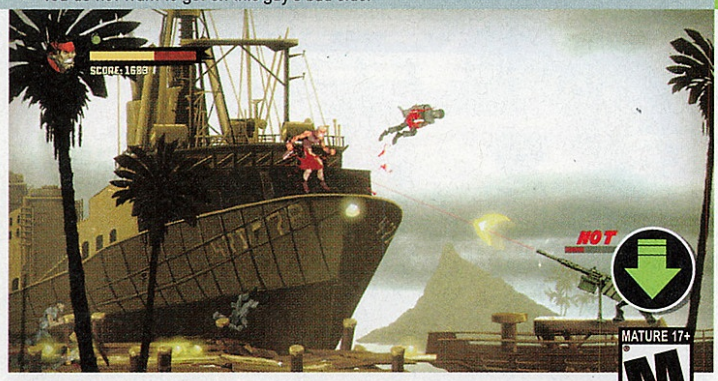
WARP

Publisher: EAi • Developer: Trapdoor • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (March 13, 2012), XBLA (February 15, 2012), PC (March 13, 2012)

Warp is odd. It's part *Portal*: You play a cutesy alien who uses short-range teleportation—*Warp*'s mechanical cornerstone—to navigate and escape a mysterious research lab. It's part *Metal Gear*: Evade armed guards, hide in objects, and then...well, possess their bodies until they explode (okay, maybe *that* part isn't much like *Metal Gear*). It's part *Metroid*: Unlock new abilities to access previously off-limits areas, and to more creatively murder your enemies. *Warp* is a game in search of a unique identity. Fortunately, the search is a fun one.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

You do not want to get on this guy's bad side.



SHANK 2

Publisher: EA • Developer: Klei Entertainment • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (February 7, 2012), XBLA (February 8, 2012), PC (February 7, 2012)

Shank is to games what *Rambo* is to film: an unstoppable one-man army with a penchant for overkill. This beautiful, bloody sidescrolling beat-'em-up offers the same sort of retro-reminiscent, button-mashing carnage as its 2010 predecessor, losing none of its expertly crafted visuals (or its dark humor) in the process. *Shank 2* might be the most well-animated videogame ever created; I've never seen cartoon brutality done quite this well. The online two-player survival mode is gravy, though it makes me yearn for a proper four-player campaign. Maybe in *Shank 3*!

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

GOTHAM CITY IMPOSTORS

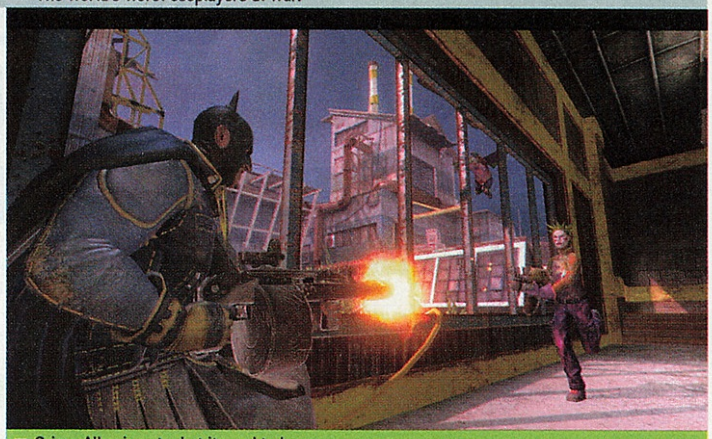
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment • Developer: Monolith Productions • Price: $15 • Platforms: PSN (February 7, 2012), XBLA (February 8, 2012), PC (February 7, 2012)

It's just the kind of bizarre concept that sounds as if it would never see the light of day: Dozens of average John Q. Publics—inspired by Batman and the Joker's nocturnal Gotham City turf wars—brew up their own low-tech copycat gangs to knock each other around and blast each other in the city. Yes, *Gotham City Impostors* is a six-on-six first-person shooter that pits Batz against Jokerz in a city gone completely haywire. To the credit of developer Monolith Productions (yes, the same studio that trotted out *No One Live Forever* a decade back), this screwy setup works firmly in the game's favor.

It takes a few games to get used to flying around on roller skates, sailing through the sky via gliders and trampolines, and negotiating the relatively complex geography that comes with myriad mobility options. After acclimating to *GCI*'s brand of nuttiness—not to mention its jury-rigged weaponry and thrift-shop costumes (all part of the charm!)—it becomes quite the fun and chaotic mess. *GCI* isn't as clean or as well-executed (or as free) as the vaguely similar *Team Fortress 2*, and the microtransaction-heavy upgrade model might rub some players the wrong way, but it's an entertaining competitive shooter with a very creative concept behind it.

OVERALL RATING: 3.75

The world's worst cosplayers at war.



Crime Alley is not what it used to be.

"Cutesygirl" probably wouldn't have had the same ring to it.

SCARYGIRL

Publisher: Square Enix • Developer: TikGames • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (January 24, 2012), XBLA (January 18, 2012)

New Super Mario Bros. for Wii and *Rayman Origins* ushered in a new renaissance in top-notch 2D platformers—and I sense that *Scarygirl* desperately wants to join the club. This spooky sidescroller packs in the usual plethora of collectibles, and the lead character's combat mechanics—she uses a whip to subdue, snare, and sling enemies—separates *Scarygirl* from the usual head-stomping fare. The controls don't feel as exact as they should, though; they're not bad enough to sour the whole game, yet they fall short of *Mario*/*Rayman* territory.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

Chop, chop!

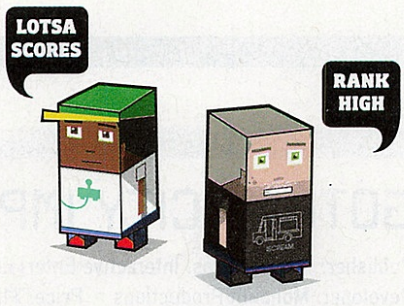
SAKURA SAMURAI: ART OF THE SWORD

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Grounding Inc. • Price: $7 • Platforms: 3DS (February 2, 2012)

Repetitive and relentless, this modest little hero-saves-princess action tale thrusts you into the role of a lone samurai with a knack for timed katana thrusts. Each level plays out with a procession of gradually trickier foes ganging up on you; the better (and the closer) you time your dodges and counterattacks, the richer your rewards. *Sakura Samurai*'s mechanics are fundamentally reactive, and the longer levels sometimes drag (death kicks you all the way back to the beginning), but it adds up to a brief and oddly addictive distraction for the precision-minded.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS



GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	14	2.75
The Adventures of Tintin	16	2.5
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	13	3
Armored Core V	18	4.5
Assassin's Creed Revelations	15	4.5
Asura's Wrath	18	3.25
B		
Batman: Arkham City	14	5
Battlefield 3	15	4
Binary Domain	18	3.5
Bit.Trip.Complete	14	4.5
Bit.Trip.Saga	14	4.25
The Black Eyed Peas Experience	16	3.5
Bodycount	13	3.75
C		
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	13	2.5
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	15	4.75
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	12	2.5
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	14	3
Capcom Digital Collection	18	3
Captain America: Super Soldier	12	4
Carnival Island	16	3
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	16	2.5
Catherine	12	5
Cooking Mama 4	15	4.25
Crush3D	17	4
Cursed Crusade	15	2.75
D		
Dance Central 2	14	4
The Darkness II	17	4
Dark Souls	14	4.5
Dead Island	14	2.5
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	15	3
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	12	4.75
Disney Universe	15	3
Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi	16	2.75
Driver: San Francisco	13	4.25
E		
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	16	5
EyePet & Friends	16	2.75
F		
F1 2011	14	4
FIFA 12	13	4.75
FIFA Street	17	3.75
Final Fantasy XIII-2	17	4.25
Forza Motorsport 4	14	4.5
G		
Gears of War 3	13	4.25
Go Vacation	15	3
God of War: Origins Collection	13	3.75
Goldeneye 007: Reloaded	16	3
Grand Slam Tennis 2	17	4
Green Lantern: Rise of the Maneaters	12	2.75
The Gunstringer	13	3
H		
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary	16	4
Harry Potter/Deathly Hallows—Part 2	12	2.5
Hole in the Wall: Deluxe Edition	15	2.5
The House of the Dead: Overkill—Extended Cut	15	3.75
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	12	2.75
I		
Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection	13	4.75
InFamous 2	12	4.75
J		
Jagged Alliance: Back in Action	18	3
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	13	4.25
Jurassic Park: The Game	16	2.75
Just Dance 3	14	3
K		
Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3	16	4.5
Kinect Disneyland Adventures	16	4.5
Kinect Sports Season Two	16	3
King of Fighters XIII	16	2.5
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	17	4.75
Kirby Mass Attack	14	4
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	16	3.25
L		
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	15	4.5
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	16	4.25
The Lord of the Rings: War in the North	15	3.75
M		
Madden NFL 12	12	4.5
Mahjong Cub3d	15	2.75
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games (3DS)	18	3.25
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games (Wii)	18	2.75
Mario Kart 7	16	4
Mario Party 9	18	4
Mass Effect 3	18	5
Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest	16	3.25
Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D	17	4.5
Might & Magic Heroes VI	15	3.5
MLB 12 The Show	18	4.5
MLB 2K12	17	3.5
N		
NASCAR Unleashed	15	3.5
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations	18	3.5
NBA 2K12	14	4.75
NCAA Football 12	12	4.5
Need For Speed The Run	16	3.5
NeverDead	18	2.5
NHL 12	13	3
Nicktoons MLB	14	2.75
Ninja Gaiden 3	18	3
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	12	3.75
O		
Otomedius Excellent	16	2.5
P		
Pokémon Rumble Blast	15	2.5
PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond	18	3
PowerUp Heroes	14	4.25
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	15	3.5
Prototype 2	18	4.5
R		
Rage	14	4.5
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	15	4
Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking	15	3.25
Rayman Origins	15	4.5
Red Orchestra 2	14	3.75
Resident Evil: Revelations	17	4
Resistance 3	13	4.5
Rise of Nightmares	13	3.5
Rhythm Heaven Fever	18	4.5
S		
Saints Row: The Third	15	4.25
Serious Sam 3: BFE	16	4.25
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2	17	3.75
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	13	4.75
Silent Hill Downpour	18	3.5
Silent Hill HD Collection	17	2.75
The Sims 3: Pets	14	4
The Sims 3: Showtime	18	3.5
Sonic Generations	15	3.25
SoulCalibur V	17	4
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	15	4
SSX	17	4
Star Fox 64 3D	13	4.25
Star Wars: The Old Republic	17	4.5
Street Fighter X Tekken	18	4
Stronghold 3	15	2.5
Super Mario 3D Land	16	4.5
Supremacy MMA	13	2.5
Syndicate	17	4
T		
Tales of Graces f	17	4
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	17	3.5
Tekken Hybrid	16	2.5
Tetris Axis	15	3.25
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	18	4
Twisted Metal	18	3.75
U		
UFC Undisputed 3	17	3
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	16	5
Uncharted 3	15	5
Unit 13	18	4
W		
Warhammer 40K: Space Marine	13	4
White Knight Chronicles II	14	2.5
World of Tanks	14	4
WWE '12	16	4
Y		
Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012	16	4.5
Z		
Zumba Fitness Rush	18	4.5

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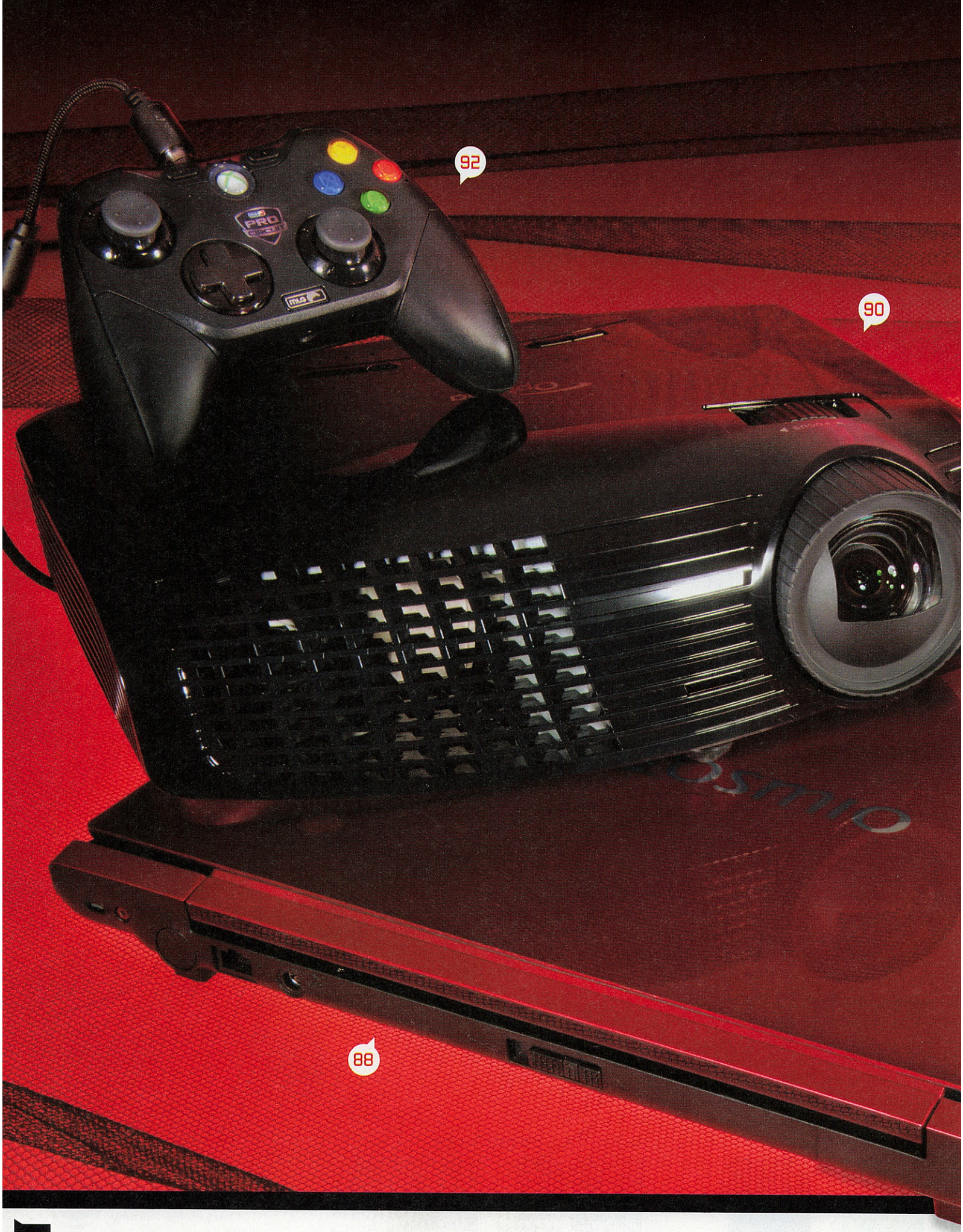
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GEAR

88 Toshiba Qosmio F755 3D Laptop

90 Optoma 3D Gaming Projector

92 Mad Catz MLG Pro Circuit Controller for Xbox 360 and PS3

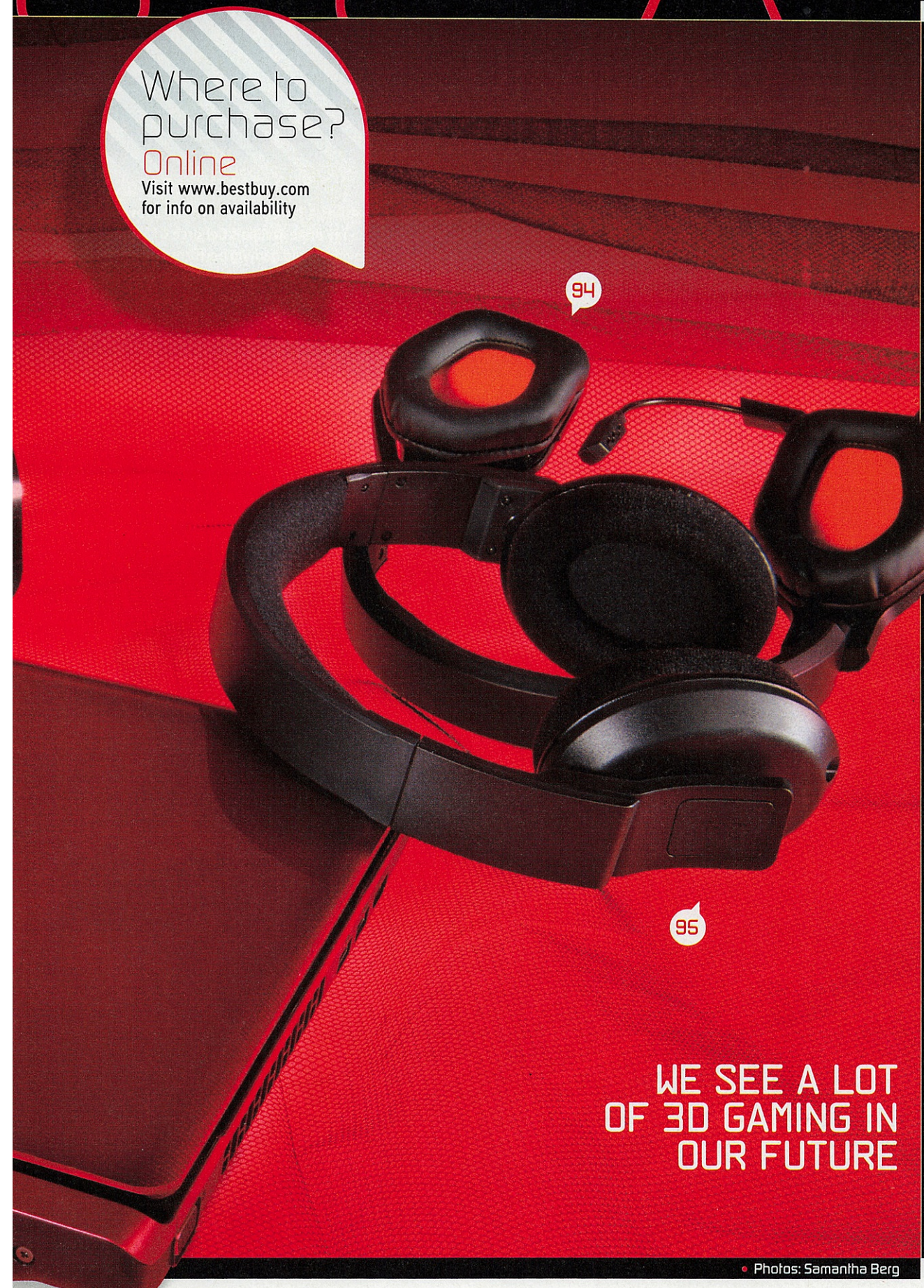
94 Trilton Trigger Xbox 360 Gaming Headset

95 Rocketfish Wireless Gaming Headset

Where to purchase?

Online

Visit www.bestbuy.com for info on availability



WIL SAYS:

This month we got our hands on some awesome gear. With Toshiba's glasses-free 3D gaming laptop and Optoma's latest 3D projector, we see a lot of 3D gaming in our future. We're also super-excited about Mad Catz's MLG Pro Circuit Controllers for the Xbox 360 and PS3.

WE SEE A LOT OF 3D GAMING IN OUR FUTURE

Photos: Samantha Berg

TOSHIBA QOSMIO F755-3D350

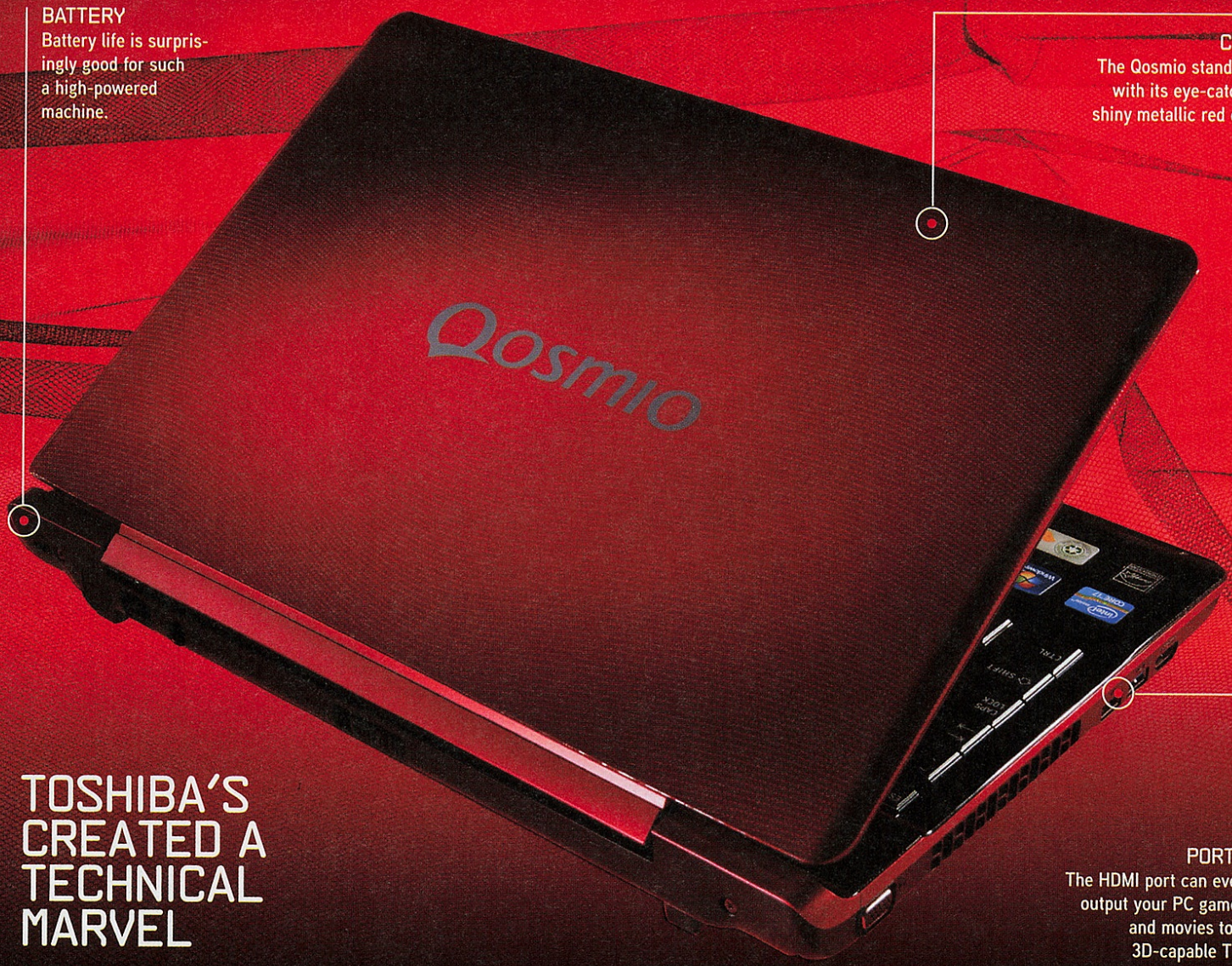
Glasses-free 3D dressed up in flashy red • Words: Ken Feinstein

It's not quite a holodisplay, but Toshiba's created a technical marvel with its Qosmio F755. This powerful laptop's unique display and head-tracking technology let you experience immersive stereoscopic 3D without the need for glasses.

The Qosmio impressed us with the depth of its 3D effect; watching a 3D movie is amazing. It really makes you want to stick your finger into the screen. The effect is similar to what you experience with a pair of 3D glasses, but we found it to be best sitting directly in front of the screen. The graphics drivers let you play almost any full-screen PC game in 3D as well as watch 3D Blu-ray movies and view 3D photos.

Thanks to the quad-core Intel i7-2670QM processor and 8GB of RAM, this laptop blazes through even the most demanding tasks. It also features a 750GB hard drive and a rewriteable Blu-ray drive. Nvidia's GeForce GT 540M provides solid gaming performance, but isn't quite fast enough to smoothly play the latest games in 3D mode at high resolution.

The 3D capabilities of this laptop are likely to be more of a novelty than anything else. That said, there's no denying the wow factor and overall excellent design of this notebook.



BATTERY
Battery life is surprisingly good for such a high-powered machine.

CASE
The Qosmio stands out with its eye-catching shiny metallic red case.

PORTS
The HDMI port can even output your PC games and movies to a 3D-capable TV.

TOSHIBA'S CREATED A TECHNICAL MARVEL

TOSHIBA QOSMIO F755-3D350

Manufacturer: Toshiba
us.toshiba.com
Price: $1499.99

OVERALL SCORE: 3.75

WEBCAM
The webcam tracks your head movements to adjust and maintain the 3D effect.

DISPLAY
The 15.6" LED display produces an amazing 3D effect without glasses.

WEIGHT
The special 3D display makes this a pound or so heavier than similar, non-3D models.

KEYBOARD
The slick keyboard includes a numeric keypad, volume controls, and a lit trackpad.

OPTOMA GT750E 3D PROJECTOR

A 300-inch gaming screen? In 3D? You better believe it • Words: George Jones

With very few caveats, Optoma's GT750E 3D DLP projector is one of the most remarkable gaming displays we've ever seen.

The secret sauce here is the projector's short throw capability. This allows it to project a massive 90-inch image at a distance of only 5 feet. That's remarkable—even in a small room, you can now have a big-screen gaming experience.

Also remarkable is the crisp, colorful, and very bright image the projector emits. The projector's 3000 Lumens is ideally suited for gaming. And then there's the ability to play games and watch movies in 3D. Just plug your PS3 into one of the two HDMI ports, sync up the 3D glasses (which unfortunately are not included and cost $80 per pair) and you're off and running.

It's important to note that the GT750E only outputs 720p video. That's not a big deal for gaming, but die-hard movie fans will probably want 1080p. (Thankfully, the projector flawlessly converts 1080p signals into 720p.)

Also worth considering: The GT750E's throw distance and ratio is so short that, unless you have the luxury of having 200- or 300-inch walls at home, it's not really possible to mount it in the back of most rooms.

That said, this size and the inclusion of two small 5-watt speakers inside the projector itself makes it perfect for outdoor gaming parties. And, at 13 x 4 x 9 inches big and only 6.5 pounds in weight, this projector is very easy to lug around—enough so that Optoma includes a special backpack in the box.

ILLUMINATED REMOTE
The backlit remote control is perfect for the pitch-dark circumstances projectors are used in.

THE SECRET SAUCE HERE IS THE SHORT THROW

OPTOMA GT750E 3D PROJECTOR

Manufacturer: Optoma
www.optoma.com
Price: $780

OVERALL SCORE: 4.5

CONTROL CENTER
The top-rear of the projector allows for keystone correction and menu access.

AMAZING THROW
The lens is capable of throwing a 90-inch image at a distance of only 5 feet!

BUILT-IN SOUND
This projector even comes with its own internal 10-watt speaker system.

MAD CATZ MLG PRO CIRCUIT CONTROLLER

Designed for the pro gamer, but also great for the rest of us • Words: William O'Neal

If you're prone to suffering from periodic bouts of technological envy, now would be a good time to turn the page. You see, working for @GAMER means that us editors get to play with toys that, if not for this job, we'd never get to experience. Such is the case with the Mad Catz MLG Pro Circuit Controllers for Xbox 360 and PS3. At $100 a pop, anyone but a professional gamer may have a hard time justifying the cost. That said, I found them extremely useful for a run-of-the-mill gamer like myself.

The first thing you notice when you hold the Pro Circuit Controller is how substantial the thing is. Compared to any other controller you may use, this thing is downright heavy. There's a lot of technology packed into the thing.

The controller was designed by pro gamers on the MLG circuit and their needs in many ways differ from those of more casual gamers. For instance, the Pro Circuit Controller comes wired only. That said, the coolest features are the ProModule components that let you totally customize your layout.

For instance, I play on both an Xbox 360 as well as a PS3, and going back and forth between the two can be weird. With this controller I can set up both controllers identically, down to the placement and style of the thumbsticks and D-pads.

At around $100 each, these controllers aren't cheap. That said, I did notice a marked improvement in my gameplay. While some of my gamer friends found the triggers to be stiff, I'm sold and will never go back to my old controllers.

XBOX 360 LAYOUT
The Xbox 360 controller rocks the X, Y, B, and A buttons, as expected.

CHOICE IS YOURS
Both controllers come with both PS3-style and Xbox 360-style D-pads.

SIDE PLATES
Like the faceplates, the magnetic side plates come in multiple colors.

MAD CATZ MLG PRO CIRCUIT CONTROLLER

Manufacturer: Mad Catz
www.madcatz.com
Price: $99.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.75

I WILL NEVER GO BACK TO MY OLD CONTROLLER

FACE-OFF!
The magnetic face-plates can be swapped for team colors or whatever colors tickle your fancy.

PS3 LAYOUT
The PS3 controller sports the requisite Square, Triangle, X, and Circle buttons.

GOT STICKS?
Whether you prefer 360- or PS3-style sticks, both controllers have you covered.

PROMODULES
The modules can be moved around to fit your individual style.

TRITTON TRIGGER XBOX 360 WIRED HEADSET

Perfect for gamers who like to chat • Words: George Jones

Last month, I reviewed the wireless version of Tritton's Trigger Stereo Headset. I found the sound quality itself to be very impressive, but was concerned about the price point and the lack of surround field effects.

This month, I spent a number of hours playing games with the wired version of the Trigger headset, and felt amazed at the incredible level of sound you can get for $40. Bass notes really bump during gaming sessions, and the mid and high-range response are top-notch as well.

I also love the microphone, which tucks away when not in use, and is completely flexible, allowing me to position it right over my mouth. And the audio control fob is also handy.

Our only caveat is that if you currently play in a surround environment, you'll find that the Trigger headset's absence of surround sound effects will take some getting used to each time you put the headset on.

NICE AND COMFY
Tritton makes comfortable headsets and the Trigger fits that bill.

TRITTON TRIGGER XBOX 360 WIRED HEADSET
Manufacturer: Tritton
www.trittonusa.com
Price: $39.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

TUCK RULE
I really like being able to tuck the mic away when not in use.

SEALED IN
The Trigger earcups create a nice seal around the ears, making for an ideal gaming environment.

TURN CHAT DOWN
Being able to independently reduce the volume of annoying gaming partners is underrated.

ROCKETFISH UNIVERSAL WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET WITH 3D SOUND

Manufacturer: Rocketfish
www.rocketfishproducts.com
Price: $89.99

OVERALL SCORE: 2.5

RECIEVER
A button on this receiver activates SRS WOW surround effects, which add depth to your experience.

NICE AND SLEEK
These babies look nice—too bad about that buzz.

REMOVABLE MIC
One nice touch on this headset is that you can remove the mic when it's not in use.

ROCKETFISH UNIVERSAL WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET WITH 3D SOUND

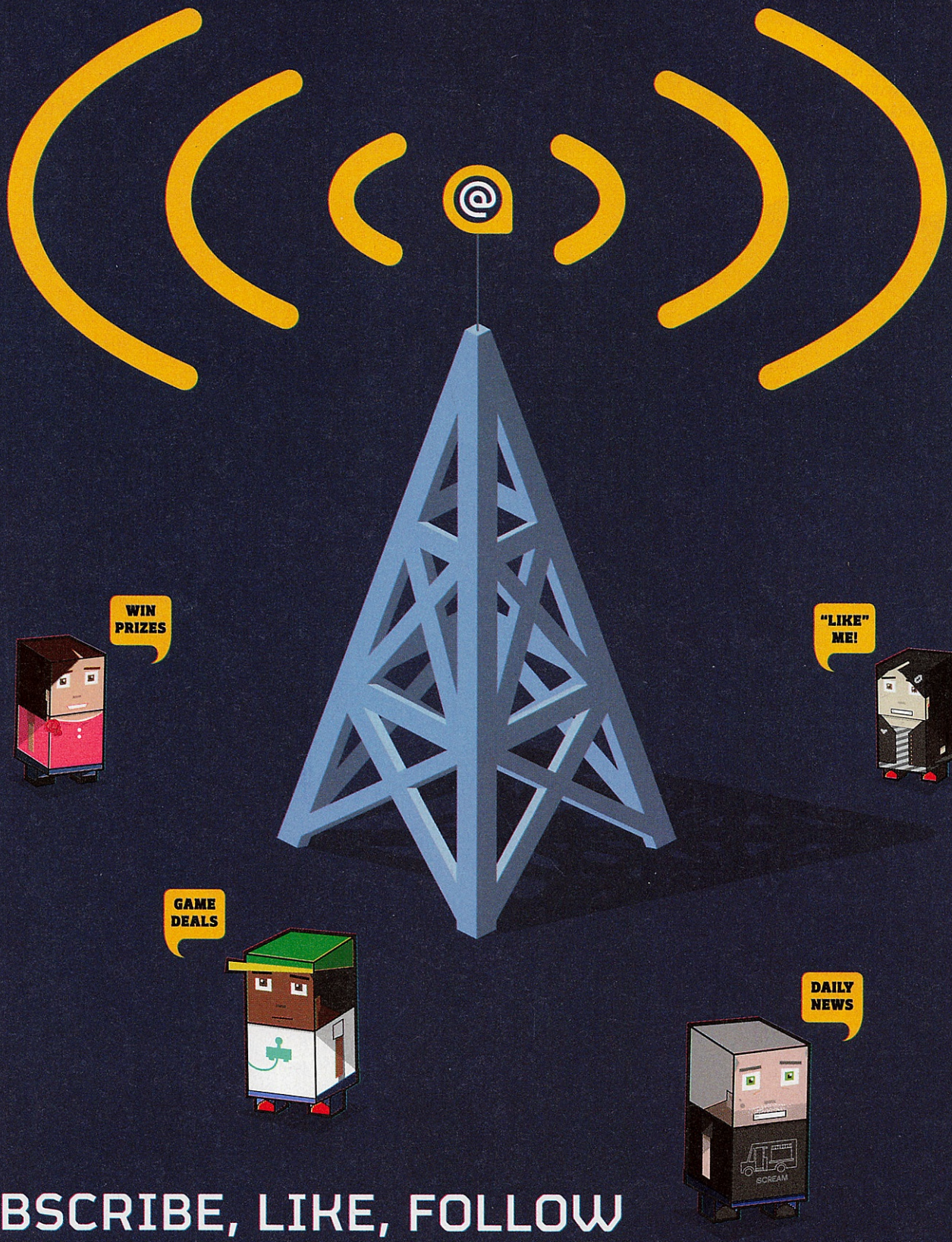
High-quality sound marred by an annoying whine • Words: George Jones

If you're in the market for a wireless gaming headset for your PS3 or Xbox 360, it's worth understanding that these are inelegant products. Using the word "wireless" feels slightly inaccurate when applied to a device that comes with four different sets of cables.

One nice thing about this headset is its compatibility with Xbox 360, PS3, and even PCs and Macs. As with other wireless headsets, you attach a base station transmitter to your system or audio receiver, and a pod-shaped wireless module to the headset and game controller.

For a wireless set, sound quality is above average, with great bass response and above-average mid and high-range reproduction.

One major problem sinks this headset, unfortunately. During testing, I intermittently experienced a high-pitched whining effect that sounded a lot like electronic interference. Normal volume levels do drown this noise out, but it's annoying enough to be a major buzzkill during quieter moments of gaming or movies. At $90, that's unacceptable.



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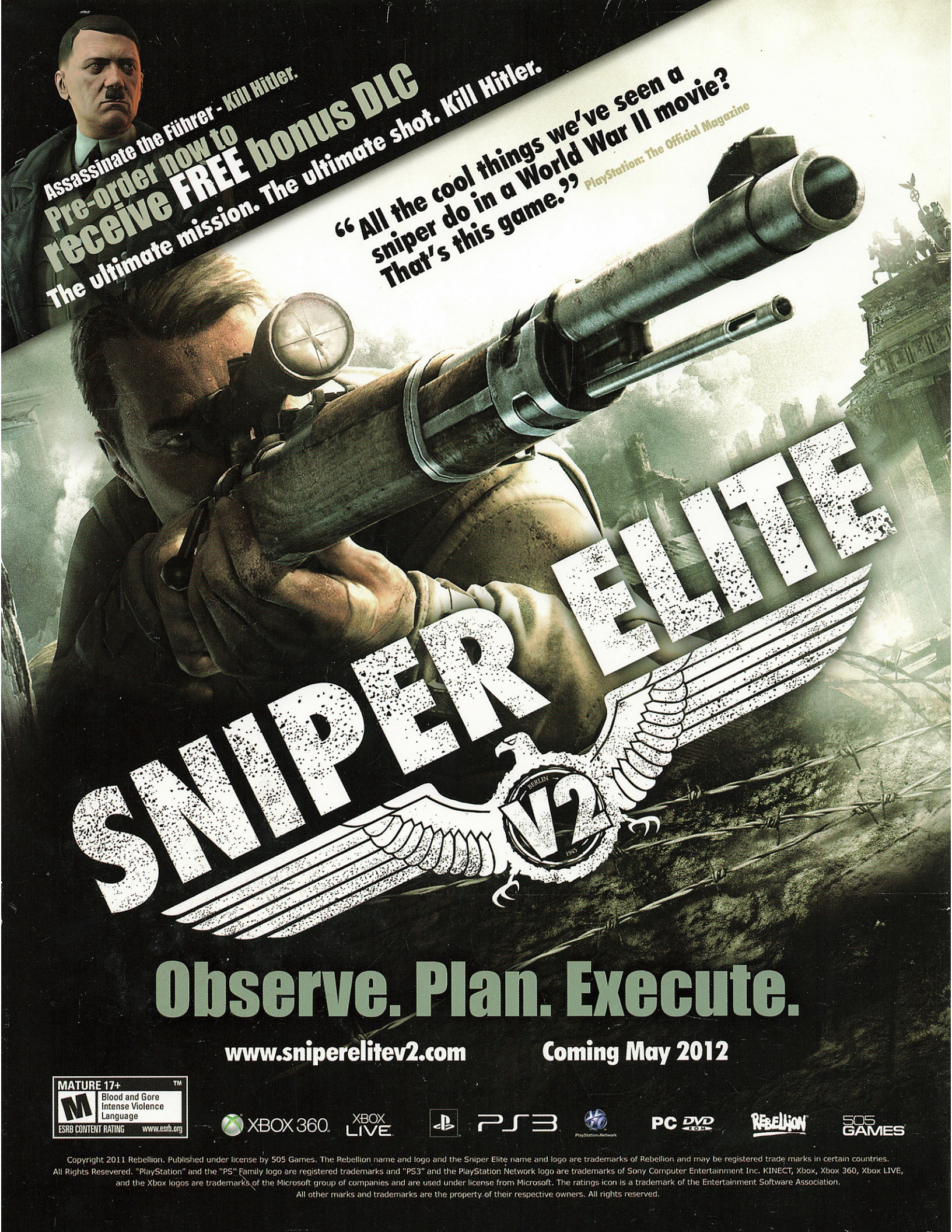

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